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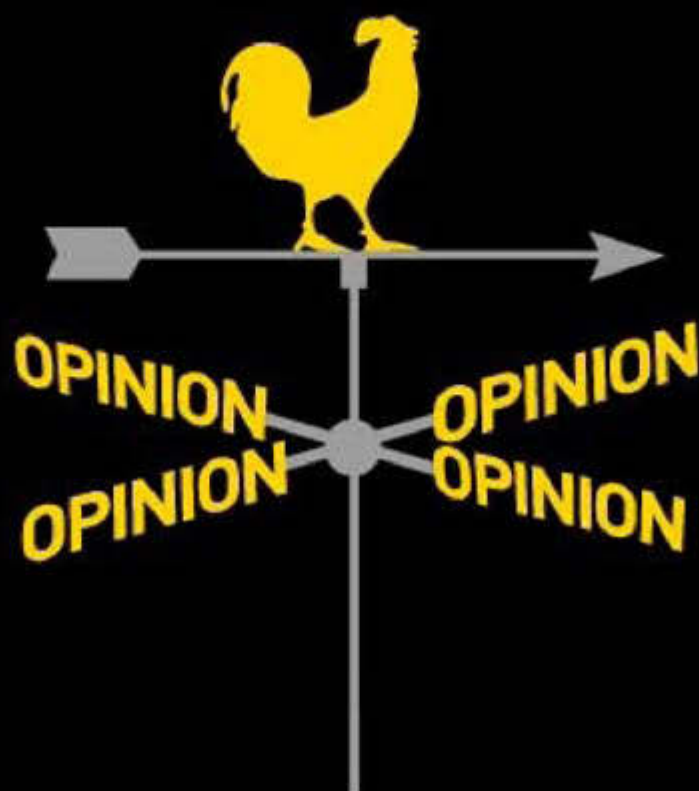
KOH KOOD ISLAND, THAILAND



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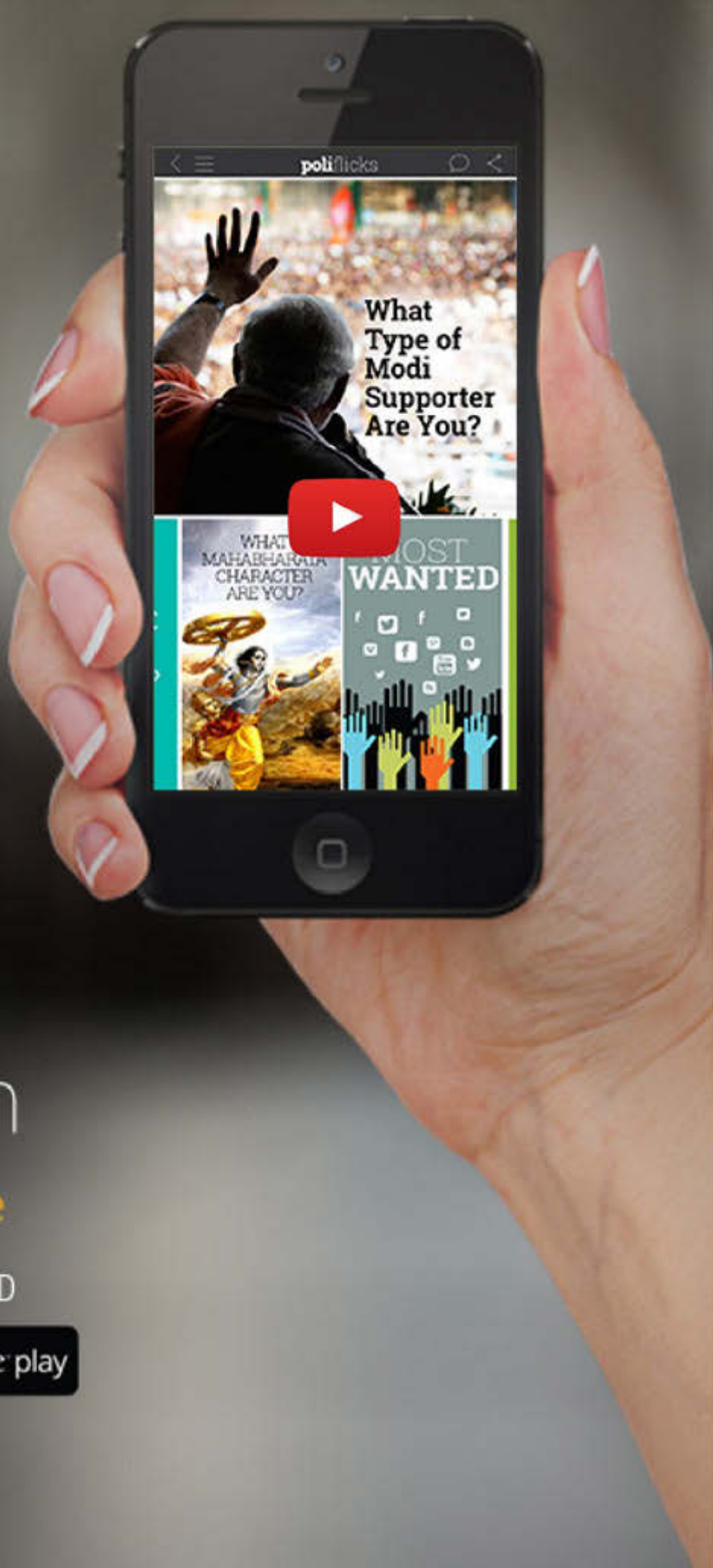


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Nature's heritage, your ideal holiday.

*If you're a nature lover, an ideal holiday would be filled with exploring nature's most stunning vistas. So, we offer you a destination that is officially one of the most beautiful places in the world. Due to their breathtaking beauty, the three areas collectively known as **'Jeju Volcanic Island and Lava Tubes'** were selected by UNESCO's World Heritage Committee as South Korea's own **World Natural Heritage Site**. And they are just waiting for you to explore them.*



The Highest Holy Mountain in South Korea

Mt. Halla or Hallasan rises 1,950 meters above sea level, making it the highest mountain in South Korea. In the crater at its summit, you will find the stunning Baengnokdam lake. It is so beautiful that there is a folktale about it that speaks of immortals that played in its waters. Nearby are about 40 oreums (small volcanic mounds) and a view of fantastic rock cliffs. Mt. Halla also has unique fir tree forests, including cinder cones and pine trees.

A Massive Lava Tube System

Many eons ago basaltic lava from a volcano flowed beneath Jeju's surface and formed the deep caves of the Geomun Oreum Lava Tube System. It stretches from Jocheon-eup to Hengwon-ri and is situated at an elevation of 456 meters above sea level. Formed between 100,000 to 300,000 years ago, the colossal system has 9 caves altogether. Among them Bengdwigul, Manjanggul, Yongcheondonggul, Dangcheomuldonggul have been declared National Nature Monuments. All the tubes are exceptionally magnificent and, considering their age, are marvellously preserved.



The Oreum of the Rising Sun - Seongsan Ilchulbong

On the east coast of Jeju is situated the Seongsan Ilchulbong that, from some angles, looks like the walls of a massive fortress. It was formed 100,000 years ago by an underwater eruption on the shallow sea bed forming a crater, the outside of which has been eroded by the sea. The beauty of Seongsan Ilchulbong at dawn will leave you speechless. That is why many people gather here on the New Year's morning to see the sun rise. At the base of this massive structure, beautiful blue waves wash against the rock in an almost inviting manner.

As many words as we may use to describe the splendour of Jeju's environs, they invariably fall short. Only when you experience the majesty of this island yourself will you see why it has been declared one of the most beautiful places on Earth.

ADVERTISEMENT FEATURE



Germany reunified. 25 year on..

The fall of the Berlin Wall was one of the most monumental events in German history. At 9.20 pm on 9 November 1989, guards at the Bornholmer Strasse border crossing let the first East German citizens enter West Berlin. Shortly before midnight, the crowds had grown so large that the gates were finally lifted and joyful celebrations swept across the city. Millions of people around the globe watched these historic scenes unfolding live on television.

Anniversary of Reunification

2014 marks the 25th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall, and in 2015 Germany will be celebrating 25 years as a reunified nation. Reunification has been a boon to all Germans. This year the German National Tourist Board (GNTB) is placing German unity at the heart of its international sales and marketing activities, showcasing the great variety of tourist attractions available in Destination Germany 25

years on from the fall of the Wall.

Reunification liberated a great number of natural treasures and cultural attractions in Germany that have huge appeal for international travellers.

German reunification heralded significant changes not only within Germany but also along its national borders. In the regions bordering Poland and the Czech Republic it gave rise to unique travel destinations that today play an important role in Germany's incoming tourism industry. The cross-border cultural sights in particular attract international visitors. These include Germany's most easterly town, Görlitz, which partly extends into Poland.

The Church of our lady in Dresden

Church of our lady, Dresden is a masterpiece of baroque architecture and a symbol of German reunification. These days, no visit to Dresden is complete without seeing the Church



of Our Lady. The Church was so badly damaged during air raids in World War II that it collapsed in February 1945. Calls to rebuild it began soon after the war was over. Under East German rule, however, the church served as a powerful reminder of the destructive effects of war. Only after German reunification did it finally become possible to rebuild it, with the help of more than 600,000 donations from around the world. The monumental sandstone construction was officially reopened in 2005. Today, this icon of German unity is one of Dresden's most famous landmarks.

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ZERO PLANNING HOLIDAYS



BHARAT AGGARWAL/WWW.INDIATODAYIMAGES.COM

I must confess that I am a planner. Almost an obsessive one in some things... always with back-up plans, much to the irritation of friends and family. Recently, I decided to just up and go to the jungles on a long weekend. I simply threw in a couple of things in an overnight bag and flew into Nagpur to drive six hours and head to tiger land—Kanha National Park in Madhya Pradesh. The days that followed were fabulous. In a camp by a river, deep in the forest, I slept, read, took long walks, trailed wildlife. I had no plans, wore whatever I could pull out of the overnighter, with no particular structure for how the day was to be spent. I think of this as a new beginning. I can almost see the

magic in 'Zero Planning Holidays'. And that brings me to the issue you hold in your hands. For those who hate the hassle of putting together trips there is some real good stuff in the pages you'll be unfolding. The Plus List is a curating of some stunning water resorts in visa-free destinations. We have lodges by the river, water villas in the oceans, spa resorts ... Dead Sea, Jordan, is my pick, and I can vouch for the sheer excitement of floating in those buoyant waters and taking a mineral packed mud bath.

One of the most hassle-free destinations to visit, for Indians, is of course, Thailand. We flew the very unconventional star Kalki Kochelin to the absolutely stunning island of Koh Kood, in the Gulf of Siam, to experience some barefoot luxury at the Soneva Kiri Resort. Private seaplanes, yachts, fabulous settings, sunsets to kill for... The team has returned having turned slaves to all the good things of life. Turn the pages to the cover story and experience the magic for yourself.

My pick of the issue is writer Shahwar Hussain's trek into the bowels of Nagaland to discover the remains of pre-WWII aircrafts that had crashed there. If you like adventure and off beat, then this is it.

We also have a nice fresh line-up of columns and interesting personalities. Check out Sommelier Stories with Ruma Singh, a wine enthusiast, blogger and 'student of wine'.

Fashion designer Reynu Taandon loves meandering through markets and will share with our readers inside information on what to shop for and where—starting with Shanghai. Bestselling author Ashwin Sanghi handpicks his top three reads in our Books section, so now you know what to pick up for your next long haul flight!

Your April just got all exciting and I am sure it is not just because of Kalki turning up the heat on our cover.

New in this Issue

WINE



with Ruma Singh

SHOPPING



with Reynu Taandon

BOOKS



with Ashwin Sanghi

Ritu Agarwal

RITU AGARWAL

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In the jungle with no plans

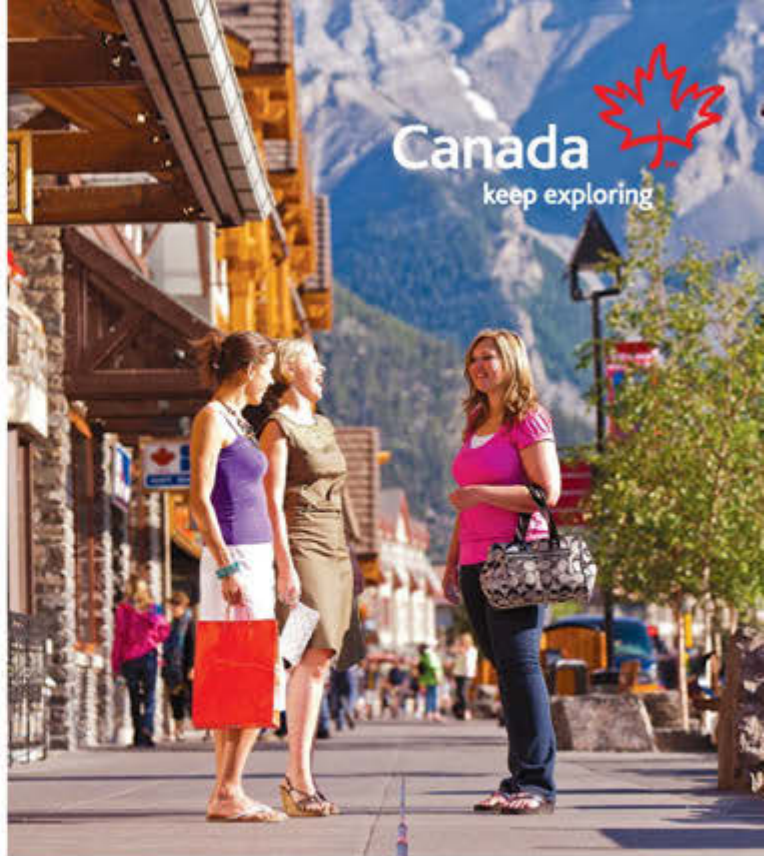


Behind the scenes with Kalki





Summer Fun in Canada!



Canada
keep exploring



Day 1 | Day 2



Day 3 | Day 4 | Day 5 | Day 6



Canada

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INDIA TODAY travelPLUS

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KALKI KOECHLIN

PHOTOGRAPHER ROHAN SHRESTHA, STYLIST GUL GARG

DRESS NOT SO SERIOUS BY PALLAVI MOHAN

EARRINGS DIOR

RING MYO DESIGNS, SWIMSUIT STYLIST'S OWN

Bateshwarnath Temple, Uttar Pradesh

Turn to the page number 84 for the Photo Essay



SIDDHARTH KAPIL

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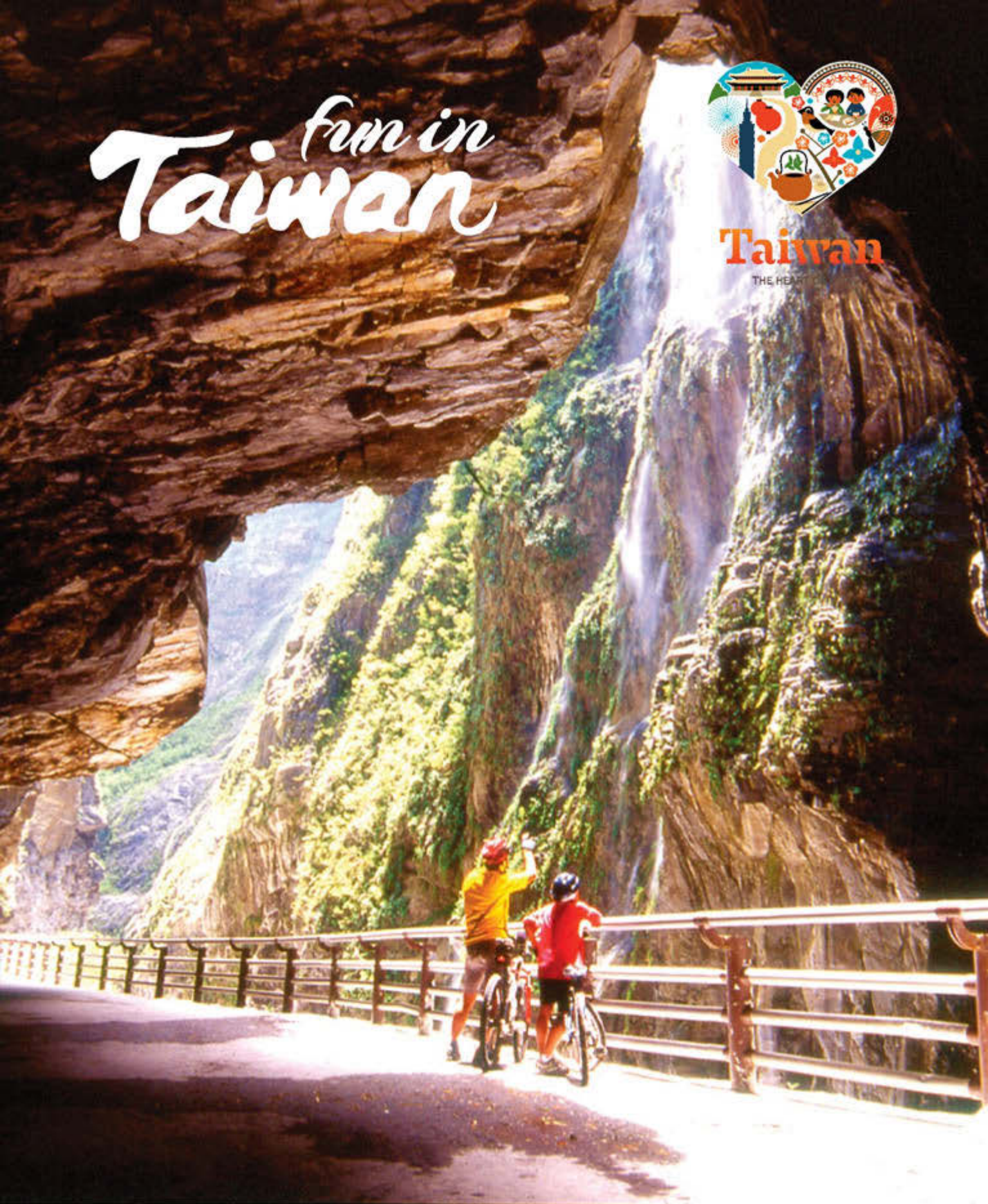


Gadgets

Fun in Taiwan



Taiwan
THE HEART



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Apart from being a chef, **Bakshish Dean** is the Executive Director of Prime Gourmet Pvt. Ltd and CEO of Johnny Rocket India. He shares his experience of attending one of the biggest gastronomic summits in world.



An automotive journalist **Shahwar Hussain** is also a travel writer. He often travels through the interiors of North East India on his motorcycle to discover more that provides fodder for his stories.



'Will travel for wine' is **Ruma Singh's** motto. She left a full time career to write on her passion: wine. She loves to travel, and her holidays are centred around vineyard visits, wine tastings and local food.



It's difficult for **Supriya Sehgal** to call one city home. Travelling for more than 250 days in a year can do that to you. If she isn't packing or planning a trip, she's getting her stories down on paper for leading publications.



While **Siddharth Kapil** spends his work hours in front of the desktop adding life to magazine through creative layouts, in his free time you will find him behind his Canon EOS 6D lens capturing nature at its best.

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VOLUME XII NUMBER 3 FOR APRIL 2015

EDITORIAL OFFICE: LIVING MEDIA INDIA LTD., INDIA TODAY MEDIAPLEX, 3RD FLOOR, FC-8, SECTOR-16A, FILM CITY, GAUTAM BUDDH NAGAR, NOIDA-201 301, UTTAR PRADESH; PHONES: (120) 4807 100; CABLE: LIVMEDIA, NEW DELHI. • FOR SUBSCRIPTION ASSISTANCE, WRITE TO: THE INDIA TODAY CUSTOMER CARE, A-61, SECTOR-57, NOIDA-201 301, UTTAR PRADESH; TOLL FREE NO: 1800 1800 100 FROM MTNL & BSNL LINES; PHONES: (95120) 2479 900 FROM DELHI & FARIDABAD; (0120) 2479 900 MON TO FRI, 10 AM TO 6 PM; FAX: (0120) 4078 080; E-MAIL: WECARELSG@INDIATODAY.COM • IMPACT OFFICES: 1201, 12TH FLOOR, TOWER 2A, ONE INDIABULLS CENTRE, (JUPITER MILLS), S.B. MARG, LOWER PAREL WEST, MUMBAI-400 013; PHONE: (022) 6606 3355; FAX: 6606 3226. • INDIA TODAY MEDIAPLEX, 3RD FLOOR, FC-8, SECTOR-16A, FILM CITY, GAUTAM BUDDH NAGAR, NOIDA-201 301, UTTAR PRADESH; PHONES: (120) 4807 100; CABLE: LIVMEDIA, NEW DELHI. • FIFTH FLOOR, GUNA COMPLEX MAIN BUILDING, 443 ANNA SALAI, TEYNAMPET, CHENNAI-600 018; PHONE: (044) 2847 8525; FAX: 2436 1942; CABLE: LIVMEDIA, CHENNAI. • 202-204, RICHMOND TOWERS, 2ND FLOOR, 12 RICHMOND ROAD, BANGALORE-560 025; PHONES: (080) 2221 2448, 2221 3037; FAX: 2221 8335; CABLE: LIVMEDIA BANGALORE. • 52, J.L. NEHRU ROAD, 4TH FLOOR, KOLKATA-700 071; PHONES: (033) 2282 1922, 2282 5398; FAX: 2282 7254; CABLE: LIVMEDIA, CALCUTTA. • 6-3-885/7/8, RAJ BHAVAN ROAD, SOMAJIGUDA, HYDERABAD-500 082; PHONE: (040) 2340 0479, 2340 1657; FAX: 2340 3484. • 39/1045, 1ST FLOOR, KARAKKAT ROAD, COCHIN-682 016; PHONES: (0484) 2377 057, 2377 058; FAX: (0484) 2377 059. • 2C, 'SURIYA RATH BLDG' 2ND FLOOR, BEHIND WHITE HOUSE, PANCHWATI, OFF. C.G. ROAD, AHMEDABAD-380 006; PHONES: (079) 2656 0393, 2656 0929; FAX: 2656 5293. • COPYRIGHT 1996, LIVING MEDIA INDIA LTD., ALL RIGHTS RESERVED THROUGHOUT THE WORLD. REPRODUCTION IN ANY MANNER IS PROHIBITED. • PUBLISHED AND PRINTED BY SANJAY THAPAR ON BEHALF OF LIVING MEDIA INDIA LIMITED, PRINTED AT THOMSON PRESS, INDIA LIMITED, 18-35 MILE STONE, DELHI-MATHURA ROAD, FARIDABAD-121 007, HARYANA. PUBLISHED AT K-9, CONNAUGHT CIRCUS, NEW DELHI-110 001. • INDIA TODAY TRAVEL PLUS DOES NOT TAKE THE RESPONSIBILITY FOR RETURNING UNSOLICITED PUBLICATION MATERIAL. • ALL DISPUTES ARE SUBJECT TO THE EXCLUSIVE JURISDICTION OF COMPETENT COURTS AND FORUMS IN DELHI/NEW DELHI ONLY. • REGISTERED OFFICE: 9, K BLOCK, CONNAUGHT CIRCUS, NEW DELHI-110 001. EDITOR-IN-CHIEF: AROON PURIE



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Letters from our readers



STUNNING SALT PANS

I have seen the Salar de Uyuni on some travel shows but could never really identify where and what it was. Intrigued I tried to find out more about it but did not know what to look for more information till I struck home with your March issue photo essay. Thank you for showing me light! Some of the pictures that have been printed in the magazine are so eloquent on the expanse and the beauty of the place. It is hard not to get tempted and plan a trip for this one.

—Jayanth Marwah, Bangalore



MAKING MUSIC

I have heard a lot about the World Sacred Spirit Festival held in Jodhpur but never got a chance to get a ringside view. In fact, attending one of these is on my bucket list. I really like how the writer highlights the historical, travel and music aspects of the festival. The problem with destination music festivals is, many sign up for them thinking that they would sit in front of the stage all day—but it does not really have to be like that. To go to an event but take time out to experience the destination is a great tip.

—Nayan Seth, Kanpur



TOO MUCH IN TRINIDAD

I never realized that there was so much to do in Trinidad and Tobago until I read the article published in your March issue. I am a nature enthusiast and when planning a trip, I often look at places that give me a chance to add activities like bird watching, trips to wetlands and lagoons to my itinerary. As mentioned in the story, once you are done with all this, we can head to the beaches in Tobago, and enjoy the sunny side up.

—Keshav Chand, Mumbai

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**Hot!**

Music meets history

NEW ORLEANS: If music and history both fascinate then you definitely need to be at the New Orleans 46th Jazz and Heritage Festival 2015. With more than 100 musicians and bands playing the fest has a sound and song for pretty much every taste in music. You can also explore the arts and culture scene at this Jazz fest's various exhibition tents, and can learn about Louisiana culture through special exhibits, and watch

artwork demos such as basket weaving, beadwork and woodcarving. It is also a good place to connect with local and international artists, using ancient crafting techniques combined with modern variations to create their wares. The Louisiana Marketplace is packed with handmade crafts representing the unique culture of New Orleans and Louisiana. The food is also one of the major draws of this festival.



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The Himalayan dash

INDIA: Drive through valleys and beautiful landscapes with luxury self-drive organizers, Cougar Motorsports Pvt Ltd as they are back with the sixth edition of their event—The Himalayan Dash. It is designed for those who love to go on self-drive expeditions with the comfort and luxury of five-star care and the thrill of a driving excursion through one of the highest motorable roads in the world; with properties like the Oberoi Wildflower Hall in Shimla and Solang Valley Resort in Manali reserved for the participants, comfort is paramount and luxury the watchword throughout the trip.



Trampoline Park **UNITED KINGDOM:** If action and adrenaline is your thing then head to Cardiff which is all set to launch a Trampoline Park where you can literally bounce off the walls. Featuring 100 interconnected trampolines, the park is all set to launch this spring and will feature an indoor arena style jumping court inside a 22,000 sq ft high-ceiling building. This is sure a theme park with a difference.



Not just derby **UNITED STATES:** It is not just a horse race! Coming up soon is the Kentucky Derby is one of the world's best known events. The festival is a multi-week celebration of the Kentucky Derby itself. The event also offers festivities ranging from steamboat and hot air balloon, races to marathons, celebrity events and the beautiful "thunder over Louisville" fireworks display. This festival is a one-of-its-kind in the world and a proud five-time winner of the International Festivals & Events Association Award for Best Overall Festival. Almost 1.5 million people gather every year to celebrate spring and the unique vitality of their community; the focus is on fun and the whimsical. www.kentuckyderby.com





Head to the hills with Sarovar Hotels

SHIMLA: Sarovar Portico comes to the Mashobra Hills in Himachal. They have taken over a running hotel which will be rebranded as a Sarovar Portico by May 2015, just in time for the summer vacations. The resort is positioned at the perfect location to offer experiences of stunning natural beauty and the country life in Himalayan villages as well. A quick get away from the hustle bustle of city life.



Witness the Taj from DoubleTree by Hilton

AGRA: Looking for a place to celebrate love? The newly launched Hilton Worldwide's DoubleTree by Hilton Agra is the one for you then. Situated in one of the foremost tourist destinations in India celebrated for the presence of the Taj Mahal, the property has 104 guestrooms, including four suites equipped with all the modern amenities. The hotel has also extended its footprint across the Golden Triangle, the most popular tourist circuit in the country.



The suites at Marylebone Hotel



LONDON: Savour gorgeous views of the city from 'The London' suites at the Marylebone Hotel.

A collection of stylish and modern suites in the heart of the city, the suites offer unrivalled views over the rooftops and chimney pots of Marylebone and Mayfair all the way to The Shard and beyond. Featuring huge terraces with retractable roofs and luxurious interiors, the new suites have everything that a modern traveller loves about Marylebone—London's most glamorous urban village. So if you are planning a luxurious holiday to London then this can be a part of your luxury bucket list.



Appointments



Sumit Kumar has been appointed as the General Manager of Hyatt Place Gurgaon, the second Hyatt Place in India and the first Hyatt Place hotel in the gateway city of Delhi NCR. Kumar is known for his involvement in the integral part of the Hyatt Hotels group for over last eleven years, where he has acquired an extensive knowledge and experience in managing large Food and Beverage operations.



JW Marriott New Delhi Aerocity has appointed **Ashish Nehra** as the new Food and

Beverage Manager. Graduating from Oberoi Center of Learning and Development, he has successfully served The Oberoi, New Delhi from July 2008 to December 2011 and held various responsibilities as the Assistant Manager Food and Beverage.



Sandeep Verma has been appointed as the Director Operations at The Claridges, New Delhi.

Sandeep will assist the leadership team in achieving the objectives of the group and ensuring brand standards are maintained. He has a lot of experience in the fields of Training, Process Management, and Operations Excellence.

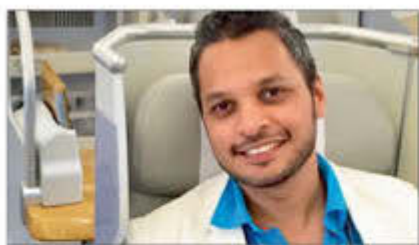
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RIAAN J. GEORGE

Eagerly spotting aircraft on global airport runways ever since he was two, Riaan says this passion continues even today when he travels the world writing and blogging about the best airline cabins, inflight meals, toiletries, seats, airport lounges, staff uniforms and more.



AIR DOLOMITI

If you're flying short-haul in the Switzerland-Italy-Germany region, you might want to consider Air Dolomiti, a small Italian airline, based in Munich, Germany. Subsidiary of Lufthansa, Air Dolomiti operates full-service flights to cities like Zurich, Venice, Florence, Rome, Pisa, Naples, Milan and Genoa on small, new aircraft. The service is exceptional and your miles can, as you would expect, be credited to your Lufthansa Miles & More programme. Tried, tested and highly recommended!



Hot!

France is in the Air campaign



The aviation industry is abuzz with Air France's new campaign video, with its tagline 'France is in the Air'—a poetic depiction of all things French. In an attempt to reposition itself as a true French lifestyle brand, the campaign features different aspects of French life—food, fashion, design, art—integrated into the flight experience. *Magnifique!*

LUXURY ON BOARD Cathay

First and Business Class passengers on board Cathay Pacific can now enjoy a new range of high-end amenities by Aesop (separate kits for men and women) and Jurlique respectively. The Business Class amenity kits are contained in specially designed pouches by Hong Kong-based design firm Seventy Eight Percent. So chic!

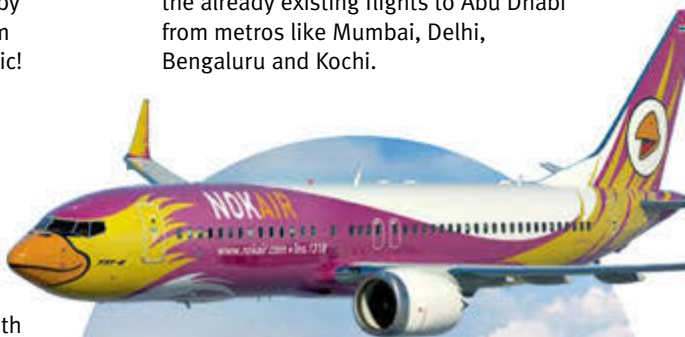


Jet-Etihad combine to give great connectivity

Thanks to efforts by Jet Airways and Etihad, passengers from smaller Indian airports flying towards Europe and the US no longer need to transit in Mumbai and Delhi. Passengers from Ahmedabad, Mangalore and Pune can now fly on Jet Airways new flights directly to Abu Dhabi and then enjoy unbelievable onward connectivity using Etihad's Abu Dhabi hub. This comes in addition to the already existing flights to Abu Dhabi from metros like Mumbai, Delhi, Bengaluru and Kochi.

GO TO AFRICA With Ethiopian

This African carrier, based in the Ethiopian capital Addis Ababa, has established itself as a serious player in the African aviation space with bullish expansion and aggressive product upgrade. The airline has now introduced a second daily flight from Addis Ababa to Mumbai. Both its flights to the city are operated on their brand new Boeing 787 Dreamliner, and offer seamless connectivity to 49 destinations in Africa.



Nok Air

Some love it, others absolutely despise it. It happens to be one of my favourites! If you're flying through Bangkok or through any of Thailand's smaller airports, you must look out for airplanes by this local airline, which features a bird's beak design on the cockpit. If you see the airplane racing down the runway, or even parked at the terminal, it almost appears like the plane is smiling back at you. A great paint job indeed!

TERMINAL ALERT Vistara Mumbai

In case you are on a Vistara flight from or to Mumbai, remember that it operates out of the new international terminal, making it the first domestic airline to operate from here. Always crosscheck your terminal and airport transfer details when you book your flight to avoid last minute mishaps.

ROUTE ALERT THAI Delhi-Bangkok

Starting March, THAI, added two new flights to its existing 14 weekly flights from New Delhi to Bangkok. Just in time for upcoming holiday season.

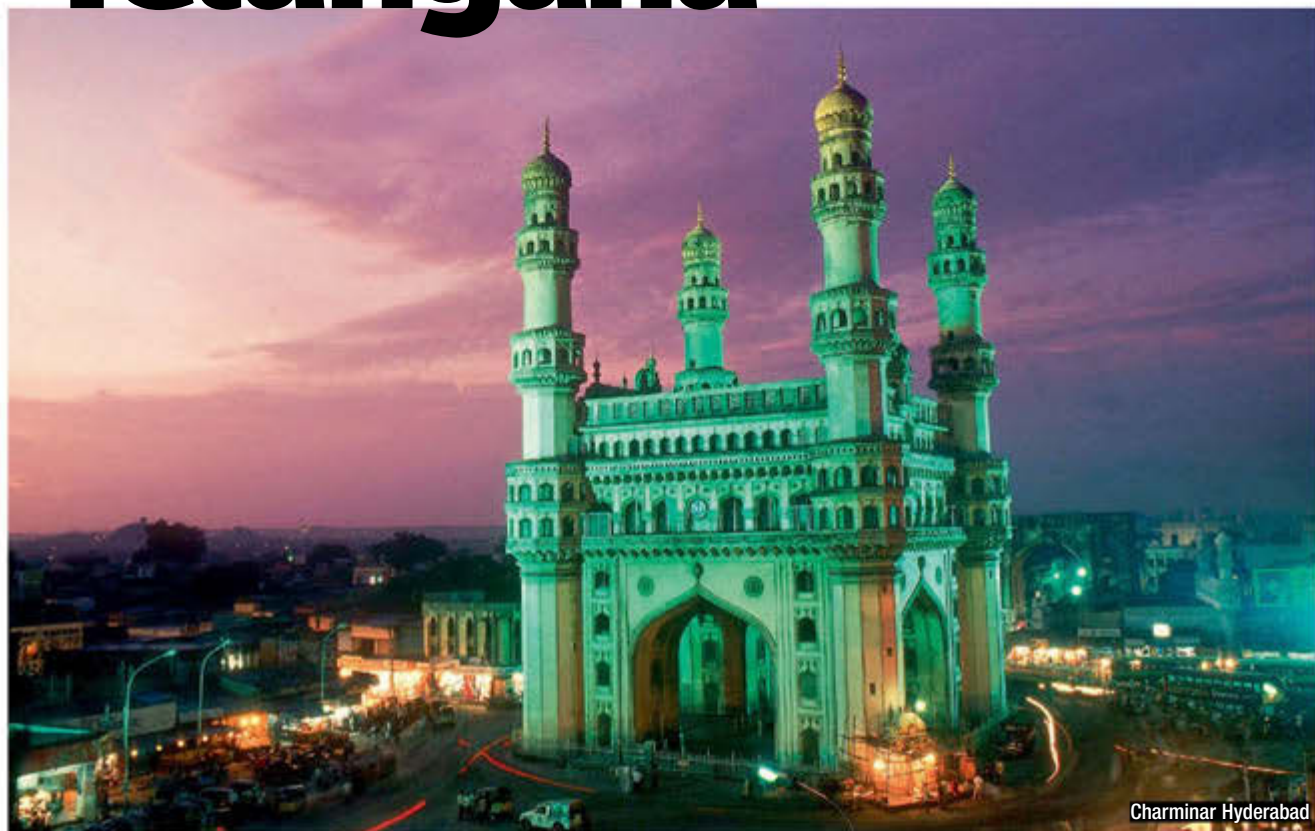
TRANSIT AIRPORT PICK Munich

By far the easiest and least stressful option to transit through Europe, Munich airport is relatively smaller and less crowded than the other enormous and terribly confusing European hubs. It is impeccably organised, has great shopping and eating options, lots of waiting areas, free Wi-Fi throughout the terminal and lots of information desks.



A Taste of Telangana

Even though it's known as India's newly formed 29th state, Telangana's history is deeply influenced by great dynasties like the Sathavahanas, Kakatiyas, Chalukyas, Mughals, Qutub Shahis and Asaf Jahis.



Charminar Hyderabad

SIPRA DAS/WWW.INDIATODAYIMAGES.COM

While the Kakatiyas contributions to architecture are considered most impressive, the Sathavahanas ruled the Telangana region for about 400 years, right from the 2nd century BC to beyond the 2nd century AD. Among Kakatiyas, Prataparudra was considered a great ruler who ruled till 1323 AD.

Owing to its rich history and culture, the state of Telangana is abundantly blessed with ancient temples, age-old architectural delights and scenic natural beauty. The state capital **Hyderabad**, affectionately known as the city of pearls was **recently ranked amongst the 2nd best**

places to visit by the National Geographic Traveller India.

Hyderabad offers the traveller a wide range of tourist attractions that effortlessly blend its rich cultural and historical traditions spanning a history of 400 years. Some popular attractions include: **Golconda Fort, the Qutb Shahi Tombs, Taramati Baradari, Chowmohalla Palace, Birla Mandir, Birla Planetarium, Hussainsagar Lake and the famous Salar Jung Museum.** It's impossible to



A girl trying on surma at the Charminar market in Hyderabad

GIRIRESH GV/WWW.INDIATODAYIMAGES.COM

speak of Hyderabad and not mention the grand **Charminar**. It is to Hyderabad what the Taj Mahal is to Agra or the Eiffel Tower is to Paris. Mohammed Quli Qutb Shah, the founder of the city of Hyderabad, laid the foundations of the Charminar in 1591. It has 45 prayer spaces and a mosque, which is a symbol of architectural splendour. Located adjacent to the south west of the Charminar is the famous **Mecca Masjid**, which was completed by Aurangzeb in 1694. For those looking beyond monuments, Hyderabad is a shoppers' paradise. The **Laad Bazaar**, is a colourful shopping centre of the old city. Shoppers can pick up a variety of bridal wear, pearls and the traditional Hyderabad stone studded bangles here.

Websites: www.telanganatourism.gov.in | Follow us on:



For reservations call toll free no: 1800-425-46464 or log on to www.telanganatourism.gov.in

AUSTRIAN AIRLINES *Boutique & beautiful*



I had flown Austrian Airlines a long time back and had absolutely no memories of it. The airline has been operational in India, from Delhi since 1997 and strangely is not top of mind recall when looking for efficient connections into Europe.

So, I honestly did not know what to expect as I checked in for my Vienna flight. With Austrian being a member of Star Alliance, and a part of the Lufthansa group since 2009, **the best part was we got to use the Lufthansa lounge at T3.**

I am delighted given that I am not a particular fan of Premium Plaza which most airlines end up using.

As I board the Boeing 767 Flight Delhi to Vienna and get shown to my business class seat I am surprised by the sharp, new interiors. The aircraft was in very good shape. The Austrian Airlines colours of white, red and light blue dominate the design. The seat is very

easy to navigate into a horizontal full-flat bed almost two meters in length, with an air cushion system and integrated massage function.

I am an aisle seat passenger on long haul as I hate jumping over people if I want to just get out and straighten out my legs. But I suddenly realise that their seat map is configured in a way that every passenger has direct access to the aisle. This is simply brilliant. **I could actually get myself a window seat with all the advantages of an aisle!**

The on-board entertainment system was again latest technology but simple to operate with a touch screen and with a neat selection of latest and classic movies, TV shows and music.

As we take off and reach cruising altitude I suddenly look up to find myself eyeballing a chef. Yes, Austrian has a chef on board facility and the gent comes around taking orders, making

suggestions. Again, for someone like me who dislikes all airline food in equal measures, this trick worked—almost turning the on-board dining into a gourmet experience!

I am specially informed about their Viennese coffee house service which I tried and absolutely loved. **A fantastic selection of 10 speciality coffees that taste as delicious as they sound.** Having a chef on board DOES have its advantages.

The seats flatten out to a very comfortable bed. The service is superb. And I must add here that to my surprise the crew was one of the most friendly I have come across in the skies.

Austrian has moved itself into a more customised, boutique airlines and in combination with Lufthansa it becomes a great option into Europe and onwards, and, its certainly one of the best options to connect to East Europe from India.



GOOD TO KNOW

Seven flights a week from Delhi to Vienna. Leaves at 2.20 am and arrives at 5.55 am with approx 8 hours flying time

Economy: ₹68,000 approx for a round trip. 1 bag max. 23kg

Business: ₹1,40,000 for a round trip. 2 bags max. 32kg each

BY RITU AGARWAL

Watch out *for this Summer Special!*
along with the **JUNE** issue of **Travel Plus**

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WHAT'S ON WHERE & WHEN

APRIL 2 AUSTRALIA

Byron Bay Blues fest

Get a chill up your spine as you listen to some of the most moving blues performances against the backdrop of beaches. But also don't be surprised if the event is entirely Bohemian with drums, dreadlocks and didgeridoos.

APRIL 5 JAPAN

Kanamara Matsuri, Kawasaki

It called the festival of the Iron Phallus, but it is truly surreal and liberating, even if some might snigger, to watch the Japanese celebrate fertility, marriage and birth with such class. A tradition which goes back to ancient times, its highlight is a parade with giant reproductions of the said organ.

APRIL 6 AUSTRIA

Snowbombing, Mayrhofen

The combination of snow and music is truly irresistible. Throw in some parties and raves and you have Snow bombing. Parties happen at the most unusual places such as igloos in the sky—to forest raves—to lumberjack parties, while you groove to the most eclectic and cutting edge music.



DANNY NORTH

APRIL 13 THAILAND

Songkran, Thai New Year

Get drenched to welcome the new year. The Thai New Year is the time when the country literally goes to water. Partly a time of veneration and partly a riot, Songkran is an occasion when images of the Buddha are 'bathed' and young Thais seek the blessing of their elders by pouring scented water over their hands.

APRIL 14 INDIA

Baisakhi, Punjab

It can't get more wholehearted and earthy than this, the festival of harvest and good cheer in Punjab. So shake a leg, feast on hearty food and wander around colourful fairs or head to the Golden Temple in Amritsar for a poignant celebration.

APRIL 24 USA

Stagecoach, India, California

A celebration of the local music, cultural and geographical richness, Stagecoach is all about music in rural California. But it does move beyond that and showcases such divergent aspects as cowboy poetry, rural Americana and storytelling.

APRIL 27 SOUTH AFRICA

Afrikaburn, Tankwa Karoo National Park

Participate in the African version of the American Burning Man Festival—where idealism abounds. A main sculpture is created to convey unity, but it is the general atmosphere of creativity, celebration and Bonhomie that prevails.



PANIJAR PRASHANT

APRIL 29 INDIA

Thrissur Pooram, Kerala

The mother of all temple festivals, this tiny town in South India comes alive with the march of beautifully decorated elephants, the thumping of drums and all round festivities for a few days.

APRIL 30 SCOTLAND

Beltane Fire Festival, Edinburgh

A bit risky but beautiful and traditional nevertheless. Join hundreds of Scots as they light a fire to welcome summer in one of the most ancient Celtic festivals. And some even dance naked, but that's not the highlight. Revel instead in the celebration of the change of seasons, in birth, renewal and hope.

APRIL 30 GERMANY

Walpurgisnacht, Mount Brocken

Witches' Night might sound ominous but it is actually fun. A spring festival with a touch of witchcraft, get active in lighting the biggest bonfire to ward off any evil spirits and welcome spring.

COMPILED BY ANITA RAO KASHI

WASHINGTON



An arty fair: The National Portrait Gallery (Smithsonian Institute, 8th and F Streets, NW, 202 633 8300) plays host to the talent of Elaine Kooning till next January. On view are her gestural portraits of people around her—friends, family and many well known figures such as JFK.



A food trail: At the lovely Rose's Luxury (717 8th St SE, Capitol Hill, 202 580 8889), a cosy and highly friendly two-storey eatery. The menu is a bit of a surprise going from Southern to Jewish to Thai to Japanese to even your granny's home cooking. Don't miss the pork and lychee salad and Southern-style fried chicken



Oki Bowl DC & Sake: (1817, M street, NW, 202 750 6703) is a hole-in-the-wall place, distinguished only by a funky sign designed like pieces of a watch. Inside, the food takes over so perch on a bar stool or grab a seat and feast on Thai red curries or indulge in a meat rice bowl.

LONDON



Peruvian food: The quirkily named Pachamama (18 Thayer Street, 020 7935 9393) is all about Peruvian food. The look and feel of the place is fabulous, with a judicious mix of rough and smooth; the place almost looks like a grand hacienda. Pamper your palate and feast on some sumptuous Peruvian flavours such as the sea bass ceviche, char grilled veal heart skewers—then end on a sweet note with a delicious and heavenly rice pudding with cinnamon ice cream.

BANGALORE



It's brewing: In Bangalore's crowded microbrewery scene comes another. The Bangalore Brew Works (Prestige Towers, Residency Road, 080 49653210) is a space with a mix of indoor and outdoor seating. Apart from brews on the tap, feast on mixed pork and variety of pizzas.



Harry's Bar + Café: (Phoenix Mall, Whitefield, 9620813000) is a cheery place with a nice ambience. A must-try are the novel cocktails such as orange green tea mojito and peach daiquiri. Feast on ratatouille, alio olio spaghetti and Thai green curry with sticky rice.



Cool Hangout: In its new avatar Oliver's Pub and Diner (2, Seetharampalya, ITPL Main Road, Whitefield, 080 69996767) is cheerful, bubbly and is just right for an evening with friends. Apart from your favourite tippie, Chicken Mexican Pizza is a must-try.

COMPILED BY ANITA RAO KASHI



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4 DAYS IN SINGAPORE

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INDIA PICTURE

DAY

1

The flight arrived early and you have hours to kill. Lace your sneakers and

head to **Botanic Gardens** that's open between 5 am and midnight. Wander through rainforest and make **National Orchid Garden** the next stop. Have traditional a breakfast at **Tanglin Gate**. Soak up history and culture at **Pernak Museum**, **Asian Civilisations** and **Chinatown Heritage Centre**. At dusk hop into the 165-metre high Singapore flyer for a bird's eye view of the city.

DAY

2

On Day 2, make shopping your day's mantra. There's **Orchard Road** where

shoppers get a fix of big, bold-faced brands. If brand is not your essential, there's enough for grabs in **Funan Digitallife Mall** (109 North Bridge Road) and **Sim Lim Square** (1 Rochor Canal Road); in these two massive emporia, prices are at least 10%-20% cheaper than other commercial outlets. The fashionista's paradise is Haji Lane, a tiny lane in the heart of the Muslim quarter.

DAY

3

Skip the city and head to the 'burbs where Singapore is at its best. Former

barracks set amidst lush jungle, **Dempsey Hill** is now a warren of restaurants, bars, art galleries, spas. There's **Geylang**, an atmospheric quarter on the East Coast that is cluttered with period architecture and has some of the best local food on the island. Keep the evening for night life. Head to **Zouk** (17 Ziak Kim Street) or mammoth **Ministry of Sound** (Cannery Block C) for a quick shimmy.

DAY

4

You cannot leave Singapore without a trip to **Sentosa**. Easily

accessible, Sentosa is perfect for family fun. There are zoos, parks, rides and some great restaurants. Leave early so that you have at least 5-6 hours in Sentosa. Return to the city for dinner at **The White Rabbit** (39C Harding Road). If the night is still young and your flight still hours away, you can easily kill your time sipping mojitos at **Margarita's** (Block 11, Dempsey Road).

PLUS SECRETS



Arty side of Ritz Carlton

Art in hotel. Might sound odd, but if you are an art lover, then you should head to Ritz Carlton for Andy Warhol, Henry Moore, Frank Stella, Robert Zakanitch, among others. Most of it was commissioned for public spaces and guest suites.



Tasty meals at Toilet

This is not scat-ty. Everything in the Toilet Restaurant borrows from poop place. But it is not as unappetising or unpalatable as it sounds. It serves toilet-themed dishes as well as desserts and the meals come in what look like toilet bowls and bidets.



Threadbare & Squirrel

Threadbare & Squirrel (660 North Bridge Road) has everything under the sun—from silly socks to vintage baubles to stunning jumpsuits. Everything comes from chic independent local labels and there is something for every taste.



At The Gallery Hotel

Sitting in the heart of the city, art-centric, The Gallery Hotel is bright, has large murals and its PopArt facade is eye-catching. This one is Single-female traveller's best option. There are several all-women guest floors. Men are not allowed—not even staff.

BY PREETI VERMA LAL

HIKKADUWA

Around 95 km south of Colombo is a small beach that has a diverting fringing reef in the shallow waters.

The tiny boat drifted on the gently swaying waters as half a dozen heads peered through the glass bottom of the boat into the clear depths of the sea. The sight that met our eyes was astonishing: multi-hued corals of various shapes and patterns lay on the seabed while brilliant fish in orange, purple and blue swam around nonchalantly or darted in and out. We were just a few hundred meters from the beach in Hikkaduwa, about 95 km South of Sri Lanka's capital Colombo, but everything was calm and added to the mesmerizing and surreal sight. We drifted around slowly, moving gently on the luminously blue water... no one was in sight; this very place obviously was frequented only by more adventurous visitors. The bright sun was the reason why the seabed was so clearly visible. From time to time, a gentle breeze blew across the surface cutting the harshness of the sun a bit as the boatman tried to show the diverse aspects of the fringing reef. I could easily make out a few different kinds of corals—cabbage, brain and table, but there were so many other varieties. I was full of expectations for a sighting of a turtle, known to be quite abundant in the area.

SECRET

SEA TURTLE FARM

Tucked away in a little green patch near Hikkaduwa on the road to Galle is the Sea Turtle Farm and Hatchery where vulnerable eggs and injured turtles are collected, cared for till they hatch and then released into the sea. Not only is it a fascinating place to see turtles but it also serves as a valuable learning tool into the lifecycle of these amazing creatures.



**ZERO
PLANNING
HOLIDAYS!**



ANITA RAO KASHI

We moved around some more, stopping for a few minutes in a place to watch a slice of marine life unfolding underwater, before moving on to the next place. At least an hour elapsed in which I had seen a wide array of creatures but was getting despondent for not having seen a turtle. Just as the boat was getting ready to return, the boatman excitedly pointed down and there it was, a green turtle, serenely swimming around, flapping its flippers, before disappearing. It was a gorgeous sight and something that remained with me a long time after I got to the shore.

As the sun began sinking, I went to Hikkaduwa Beach, a beautiful stretch of pale sand fringed by coconut trees met by cerulean water. The beach was almost deserted and I waded into water letting the warm waves soothe and relax. A few hundred meters away I saw fishing boats being lugged ashore. As the shadows grew longer and the sun sank, turning the water into a mass of molten gold, I retired for the night at my hotel located just near the water's edge.

The next day, it was a whirlwind tour of some of the sights nearby—a towering, serene Buddha statue surrounded by water erected as a memorial to the devastating Tsunami, the moonstone mines where the beautiful and ethereal gem is mined and some temples. I whizzed by along coastal roads passing plantations and mango groves which together made up this lovely town. I was back at the beach by evening, to get my fill of yet another sunset before heading back home.



INDIA PICTURE

AT A GLANCE



Getting there: Hikkaduwa is 95 km south of Colombo. Many carriers offer flights to Colombo from Indian metros. Hire a taxi to take you to Hikkaduwa.



Stay: Most hotels in Hikkaduwa are located on Galle Road along the coastal road. There are plenty of options including budget, but choose from Hicks Villa (59, Patuwatha, +94 777300214) or Lavanga (Galle Road, +94 912275941).



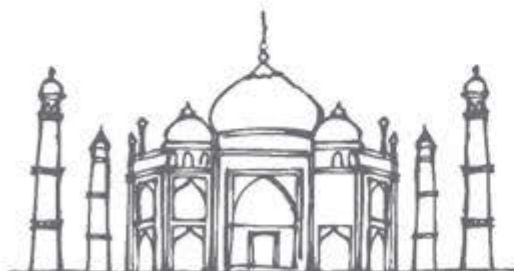
Shop: Interesting gems, moonstones, seashell artefacts, spices and spice oils can be found here.

BY ANITA RAO KASHI



AVINASH GOWARIKER

Bollywood's first lady talks about visiting the monument of love—Taj Mahal with Shah Rukh Khan, her eternal lust for Goa, and a fun tale of travel with her son Aryan



Gauri Khan

A vacation spot

Goa is one of my favourite places. We—family and friends—have been vacationing there regularly, over years. I love the laid-back vibe, the beaches, catching the sun set at a beach resort, relishing Goan cuisine, treating myself to relaxing spa treatments and just enjoying the moment.

Goa or Mumbai

As much as I love Goa, Mumbai is home. While I like the beaches as vacation spots, I eventually begin to crave the buzz of a city.

Newest thing tasted

The scrumptious banana cake at Ciprianis in New York City tops my bucket list.

Anecdote from a flight

When Aryan was just about two years old we were taking a flight to New York. He started crying on the plane and the flight attendant came to me saying, 'Ma'am the other first class passengers are getting disturbed.' Since crying is what little kids do, I told her, in that case, the airline should ban children from first class!

Destination I recommend

Apart from Goa, I'd say every Indian must visit Agra to have a glimpse of Taj Mahal. I went there for the first time, years ago, with Shah Rukh. At that time, he was shooting for a film there. I still remember the moment when I first set eyes on the all white marble mausoleum; I was left in absolute awe.

Latest shopping acquisition

On my travels I usually pick up something for the house. Recently, I visited Rajasthan and got back cupboards and mirrors that have a very ethnic, rustic feel to them. Also, from a recent trip to Florence I brought back some vintage lamps.

Trains, planes or cars

Despite the anecdote mentioned above, I'd have to go with planes because they are zippy and comfortable.

Most extravagant holiday

When we went to Dubai and the Sheikh gifted Shah Rukh a villa at The Palm Jumeirah. It was really exciting to receive the generous gift, and our home there is both gorgeous and serene.

Looking forward to visit

I am really looking forward to Planet Hollywood in Goa, since I've been involved in designing the property. Everything about the property spells luxury. It has a total of 115 rooms, and 15 luxurious tents on the beach. There's also the Heart Bar, where the colour scheme has pastels and whites and a Hollywood theme runs through it. So everything from the cushions to the walls, have pictures of Hollywood stars and iconic films. Also, what I really like about the property is that it isn't too far from the airport—a 10 minute drive, so if I have just a day to spare and want to visit my favourite vacation spot, Planet Hollywood makes that possible.



Planet Hollywood

AS TOLD TO KIRAN MEHTA



Cape Town is one of the most scenic places I have encountered. The majestic Table Mountain forms a magnificent backdrop to this thriving city. From mountains, harbours and gardens, Cape Town has so much to offer that it is almost surreal.

I love their outdoors, and the fabulous food, but no Cape Town holiday is complete without a visit to their world famed vineyards. Pulling yourself away from the scenic beauty of the Cape Peninsula is bit difficult, but an hour's drive can take you to urban landscapes with delightful towns, villages and country estates such as Stellenbosch and Franschhoek.

My trip to this town included a drive out to an old winery in **Stellenbosch**, that is situated about 50 km east of Cape Town, to try some of the world's best red wines, while taking in the breathtaking views of the surrounding mountains. Stellenbosch was the first wine region in South Africa to set up a wine route with an organised network of wineries. The route boasts of almost 200 wine and grape producers. One can stay a night or two in Stellenbosch and in the morning, you will wake up in the most stunning surroundings of old school Dutch architecture. More than 100 wine cellars, most of which are open to the public, surround the oak-lined South African town, and tasting tours operate daily. Winter brings a four-day festival celebrating the local vintages

Home to golden beaches, munificent vineyards and delectable seafood Cape Town is an old maven at seizing any traveller's soul. Christopher Fordyce shares why he can't get enough of it.



RITU AGARWAL

PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY, SOUTH AFRICAN TOURISM



CHRISTOPHER FORDYCE

Is the Regional Commercial Manager for South Asia at British Airways. He is currently based at the airline's South Asia headquarters in Gurgaon. A business graduate from Sheffield University, Chris enjoys travelling, snowboarding and sailing.

Hermanus is a major whale-watching location, and also a base spot for shark-cave diving.

I love driving and one of my most exciting drives has been in South Africa down the coast and over mountain passes. My favourite destinations are places where the experience of just being at the place is fulfilling by itself rather than a long list of overcrowded, selfie-stick filled 'tourist sights' where you feel that you are forced to be amazed (normally to justify the fact you have just queued for over an hour and paid a small fortune to get in!)

Cape Town is one of those mesmerising places where you can hire a car and get going to experience various spectacular

views, restaurants, nearby wineries and beautiful beaches.

Day trips are often best spent driving down to **Cape Point** via **Boulders Beach** where the views will fill up your camera's memory card and the hilarious African Penguins will keep you entertained for long hours! The evenings are meant for alfresco eating and drinking in one of Camps Bay's many incredibly trendy sea front restaurants where on one side you can eat some fresh seafood while on the other, watch the sun go down on the southern hemisphere. The locals are very friendly and always happy to point you in the right direction so don't be afraid to ask. Cape Town is not dangerous despite what the general perception may be.

They walk, hitch-hike, drive and ride through continents, collecting memories as they drift along. They are the drifters. We bring you pages from their diaries.

In search of greener pastures

Searching for peace and quiet through the Mohand Forest, HARSIMRAN SHERGILL wonders off into uncharted territory to discover adventure instead



HARSIMRAN SHERGILL calls herself a nomad and is almost always ready to drive out of town. Having been on many a road trips around India, she's has mastered the art of seeking help from strangers because there's nothing more she hates than changing flats on highways!



Somehow, over the last four years, plants have become a significant part of my life.

Searching for *magnolia champas* and flame of

the forest in the Forest Research Institute, Dehradun became intrinsic to my holidays. This time around, my partner had zeroed in on a nursery at the tip of the forest, on Dehradun's periphery. What was meant to be a holiday soon culminated into regular sights of hundreds of plants ready to be loaded into trucks. I couldn't complain, since a huge part of me liked hanging around nurseries, sipping some of the worst coffee ever. Having bought enough greens ahead of the planting season, on our drive back to Delhi, we decided to take a scenic route dotted with

dense forest. A short distance from Herbertpur the road leads to the Mohand Forest that gently kisses the Rajaji National Park at one end.



INDIA PICTURE

With a weakness for stunning drives, I quickly pulled out a tab and started searching for routes that would connect us back to NH-1. The idea was to cross the forest and touch NH-1 either at Karnal or Panipat. Google maps had chalked out two of the best routes. We decided on taking NH-72. The drive turned out to be stunning with a thousand shades of green. Part of me wanted to pat my shoulder for having opted for this route rather than a mundane highway. We'd often stop along the way to admire the canopy, while my partner rattled named of trees, checking out plants as if they were gorgeous women who had descended from the heaven's above!

A few kilometers further and about a dozen "ooos and aaahhs" later, we stumbled upon an intersection. Google Maps was strictly directing us to turn right. But staring at a rather stunning road up ahead, ignoring the Google Maps was not much of a struggle. Off we zoomed listening to heart than to technology. After all the heart is always right isn't it? What followed was one of the worst experience's in a road hog's life. In order to satiate our greed for green, we had landed ourselves on one of the craziest stretches that Uttarakhand had to offer. Saharanpur was a short distance away, but before we could make it anywhere near town, we were looking at a 30 kilometer stretch with no semblance of a road in sight!

Looking at alternative routes, the easiest way of getting to something that even remotely resembled a road was about 5 kilometers away that connected the town of Deoband to Saharanpur. Some 8 km later, the sight of a narrow road leading to Deoband was equivalent to a high I got from seeing the great singer Abida Parveen perform live!



It was a sight to behold. The detour was long, wrong and unnecessary, but that was the only way to get to the capital. Having tried so hard to avoid the usual madness of the highways leading to Delhi, we were now on one of them! And, on top of it, we were forced to take perhaps the worst possible route into Delhi—through Ghaziabad. Every traffic light took me back to that intersection. If only we had stuck to the original plan and followed dear old faithful Google like obedient school children abiding by the teacher's orders! I took solace in the fact that at least we had discovered a wonderful route. Long and extra hours later, after plenty of "what if and cranky thoughts" home was finally in sight. We had made it!



tips

Sometimes Google maps is right about routes. Take local help for road conditions.

Even though Google maps is pretty detailed about maps these days, there are times when detours are marked where no roads exist.

Always carry a copy of the state map, if you're planning road trips. They are refreshingly handy.



PHOTOGRAPHS BY SIDDHARTH KAPIL

AKIRA BACK

CHEF AKIRA BACK

Address: JW Marriott New Delhi, Asset Area 4, Hospitality District, Aerocity,
IGI Airport, New Delhi-110 037
Cuisine type: Japanese and Korean
Tel: (011) 4521 21 21; Reservations: Recommended
Timings: 7 pm to 12 midnight

WHO

Akira Back is a noted celebrity chef from Las Vegas who fuses traditional and cutting edge cuisine with great flair. In 2008, he opened his first restaurant, Yellowtail Japanese Restaurant & Lounge, at Las Vegas's Bellagio Resort & Casino. Having won various accolades he brings with him his Korean heritage. "My cooking is much like my mother's," he says and so the menu features innovative Japanese dishes with Korean accents. He spent a year in India understanding flavour in its cuisines and then decided to open his restaurant.

WHAT

TUNA PIZZA

The Tuna Pizza with Ponzu Aioli and Truffle Oil is prepared over half a day early. It has a tortilla base, is garnished with micro radish sprouts, beet sprouts, pea sprouts, sliced truffle, shiso (Japanese basil) and Maldon sea salt. It is a treat not only for the palate but for the eyes too. A one-of-its-kind pizza, you are bound to order another one once it is over. It is Chef Back's favourite from the menu as well.



WHERE

AKIRA BACK

Named after the Chef himself, it is a contemporary Japanese restaurant with an essence of Korea designed with a modern perspective. On offer are small but shareable portions, featuring fresh seafood from around the world, organic meats, local and seasonal produce. Influenced by the Indian vegan diet, Chef Back has introduced some interesting dishes along with a 'pepper' version of the signature Tuna Pizza. Surrounded by greens and water features, it is a trendy restaurant with a central glass kitchen housing the longest grille in the city.

BY KANIKA SHARMA



REYNU TAANDON

A fashion designer Reynu has carved a niche for herself through her perspective of colours, contour, soft intricacy and her company Mynah Designs. She also travels around the world for fashion weeks and meanders through markets to add on to her creations and closet.

Shanghai

The most populated and the largest city of China is also known to be a hub for shoppers. I recently travelled to Shanghai and was not only left in awe of the variety of markets, products and their exclusivity, excess glamour but also the grandeur of the monuments specially the Jade Buddha temples. From semi-precious stones to cashmere and exclusive tea flavours, I explored the city's lanes and markets looking to add exclusivity to fill my bags.

South Bund Fabric Market

399 Lujiazang Road, Huangpu

While the cashmere wool stoles are definitely a sight for sore eyes, this particular store offers jackets of the same material that can be made to order within 24 hours. Once, the designer,

Muzaffar Ali got an achkan made from there and I a Victorian style coat. It is still a prized possession in my closet. You can also get various stoles and buttoned shawls from there as well.



Tianshan Tea City (Tea stalls, shops)

518-520 Zhongshan West Road

If you are a tea lover, then this is definitely a haven for you. The market houses over 150 stalls sorting—like tiny shops packed together in Venice—selling, and brewing tea, with vendors ready to tell you about their product. I myself have 24 different types of fabulous flavours including rose and peach. Sipping on them takes me back to Shanghai's lanes every morning.



Chaotian Gong (Antique market)

Wangfu Street, Nanjing, Jiangsu

Once you are done buying goodies for yourself, bring back some souvenirs for loved ones. The Chaotian Gong market is a meeting place for many Chinese antique collectors, some of whom run small businesses at their own stalls. Come and search for some treasures. The sellers are very convincing, so be careful and avoid buying fakes.



SHUTTERSTOCK

Duo Yun Xuan (Shop for Jade ornaments)

422 Nanjing Rd Pedestrian Street

This particular store is known to be the most established store for statues and ornaments that are made in the semi-precious stone—Jade. You would find many jade ornaments that are sold in other shops too, but there could be a possibility of it being a fake. As you enter the shop, it is difficult to resist the temptation of this gorgeous green stone, even if you already have a few.



Shanghai Chopstick Store

No. 13, Yuyuan Road

Set up in 1979, chopsticks here are made in bamboo, bone and other materials. There are more than 100 different kinds of chopsticks in China, and you can find every single one in this store. What makes these so different from the others is that not only they are beautifully painted but are also engraved with combinations like emerald green and golden. A must for the shelves.





FEELING BLUE

Get the cool factor on this summer season as you head out with Versace's eyewear spring summer collection — a square profile and broad lines and modern elegance.

Price: ₹15,500

WATCH IT

Make a bold and beautiful statement while on the go with the Tambour éVolution collection by Louis Vuitton.

Price: On request



EASY

ACCESSORISING

Add a dash of delicate style to your outfit with silk wool scarves from Wrap Studio's 'Encaje' collection' articulates the stylish blend of wool-silk and laces.

Price: ₹3,500



IN LINE

Strapped with stripes, let your feet enjoy cool breezes and the comfort of stylish sandals by Cornelian.

Price: ₹27,000



COOL AND QUIRKY TRAVEL PRODUCTS



SMOOTH SAIL

Keep it cool and casual with bright hues during summer time travels, yacht rides and beach bumming with shirts from Arrow's Spring Summer 2015 Arrow Sport collection

Price: ₹2,299



A GOOD EAR

Good music often adds to the experience of long journeys. Start your trip on a musical note with BeoPlay's H2 flexible over-ear headphones.

Price: ₹14,990



STYLISH AND STATIONARY

After trotting around the world, keep postcards at their place with this stallion paper weight by Frazer and Haws as you write one each for friends.

Price: ₹4,300

FLORAL AND FAB

Travel in style with a retro-chic pair of travel bag and suitcase true to the upcoming season with Samsonite's Fashionaire line.

Price: Travel Bag-₹11,900, Suitcase-₹32,900



Arrow Sport available at lifestyle stores in Bangalore, Mumbai and Delhi; Cornelian Boutiques at Delhi: DLF Emporio, Vasant Kunj; Mumbai: The Taj Mahal Palace & Tower, Bangalore: No 18 & 19, The Collection; Beo Play H2 headphones available at Bang&Olufsen, 246, DLF Emporio, Nelson Mandela Marg, Vasant Kunj, New Delhi-110070; Frazer and Haws Showroom in: Delhi-Shop No. 11, Main Market, Lodhi Colony, Mumbai: Estaa, 2nd Floor, Kwallity House; Samsonite Black Label-Fashionaire is now available at Khan Market, New Delhi; Wrap Studio, 116-A, Shahpur Jat, Near Sirifort Auditorium, Neel Sutra, Atelier-Khan Market, wrap-studio.com; Tambour éVolution collection by Louis Vuitton available at brand's stores; Versace sunglasses available at Sunglass Hut Outlets across India

Travel smart and stay trendy with the latest gizmos and gadgets!



PANASONIC NUBO

Bringing the words surveillance and cute together is Panasonic's Nubo, the world's first security camera with built-in 4G support. Without dependence of Wi-Fi, the Nubo can be set-up anywhere you can find 4G, 3G or 2G support. It can shoot 1080p video with a wide viewing angle of 140 degrees and there's a speaker too. It can be managed through an iOS and Android app. The device opens for order in April for \$250. www.nubocam.com

LG URBANE SMART WATCH

LG leapfrogs competition by launching a smart watch that doesn't need smartphone support. The LG Urbane LTE packs in LTE, NFC, Wi-Fi and Bluetooth communications. Along with displaying time in over thousand watch faces, the Urbane can make calls, send text and use internet apps. The watch also packs sensors to monitor your health. The device has a 1.2 GHz processor and a 700 mAh battery. No pricing details yet, but an April launch anticipated. www.lg.com

GALAXY S6 EDGE

Samsung unveiled the much awaited update to their Galaxy line of devices with the Galaxy S6 & S6 Edge. Both devices feature a 5.1-inch AMOLED display with the Edge's display curving around the sides. The phones are powered with an octa-core processor and are supported with 3 GB RAM. Interestingly, Samsung has done away with a removable battery and a SD card slot in these phones. The devices feature a 16 MP (back) and 5 MP (front) cameras and offer 4K video recording at 30 fps. The India pricing of the device and launch date is awaited. www.samsung.com



Plus
PICK

APPLE WATCH

Apple launched the Apple Watch in 3 major variants-Sport, Watch and Edition. Apart from being a timekeeper, the device is designed to be a communication companion and a fitness tracker. The watch's 'taptic feedback' serves a method to deliver notifications along with a gentle tap on your wrist. The Watch is priced from \$349 onwards, going upto \$10,000. Log on to apple.com/watch for more details.



FREDERIQUE CONSTANT HOROLOGICAL SMARTWATCH

If the words Swiss, analogue and smartwatch excite you, then you must wait for Frederique Constant's Horological Smartwatch. Beneath the exterior is technology that can track sleep, activity. Data collected can be viewed through an app. Device is priced at CHF 1295, release date to be announced. frederique-constant.com





SIDDHARTHA SHARMA

Siddhartha Sharma is a technology journalist and anchor of the popular Gadgets and Gizmos Show. You can catch the latest reviews and news from the world of technology in India on the show that airs on Headlines Today every Saturday and Sunday.



As you plan your next trip with your children, make sure you have their attention with some apps. Kids have a short attention span and a few apps on smartphone or tablet can help them cope with all the travel stress and make your vacation enjoyable.

5 Travel apps that will help take your journey to the next level

PETTING ZOO - ANIMAL ANIMATIONS



Children sure love animals and to pet them virtually is a different experience for them altogether. This application has 21 beautifully animated animals and is full of surprises, wit and quirky animations to keep your children entertained. The app is available on iOS for iPhone and iPad at a price tag of ₹190. Petting zoo has been

downloaded over 1 million times by iOS users. The app features interactive animal animations by illustrator Christoph Niemann. With gesture swipes your kids can stretch, flip and wobble these animations and get amused. This is one app that can entertain your kids for hours altogether without interrupting your vacation time.

PLAY-ORIGAMI ZOO



This is an Origami application where children can create their own set of animals and enhance their Origami skills. Play-Origami Zoo comes for a nominal price tag of ₹199 on both iOS and Android. In this app, they can fold, bring their creations to life and also take care of lions, penguins, elephants and various other animals.

To make things more interesting, kids will also have to feed their animals and make them happy. Petting and playing with them and letting them sleep are also a part of the app. It also includes different mini-games, photo modes, shelters and accessories for kids to explore and interact. This is a good learning app for your growing one.

PICO THE PENGUIN



Pico the Penguin is another fun and educational app for kids in the age group of 2-5 years. Available on iOS for a price tag of \$0.99 the app features a penguin's journey to see the world. Pico is a travelling penguin and he likes colder climates. The objective of the game is to lower Pico's temperature in some very warm

places, using imaginative ways. It is a simple game app for beginners, with a straightforward user interface and limited content. Yet it is able to grab the attention of kids while on the go. I mean come on who doesn't like a penguin do silly stuff? Warning: this app is pretty addictive.

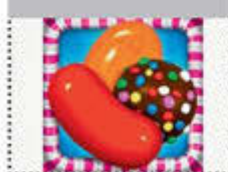
SAGO MINI SPACE EXPLORER



Sago Mini Space Explorer is an exploration game that lets your kid explore the space around him on his own. Tagging along with them in the game, is a dog named Harvey. There are a few surprises in this as well. This particular game is a very visually appealing one and can make your kid learn a few good things about space

as well. This is a paid app on iOS for \$2.99. The game's open-ended play experience is perfect for toddlers and those still in pre-school. It has been designed by the developers while keeping in mind the little ones so that the game and the gamer have a seamless experience.

CANDY CRUSH SAGA



This is probably not a new one out of the store, but definitely deserves a mention. Well this game is absolutely harmless yet so addictive. People at King really know how to grab the attention of your children and you as well. This is a free application that is available on iOS and Android with a few in app purchases. But if you are patient enough about clearing various levels, you don't need to spend a single penny. Kids join in with Tiffi and Mr. Toffee in their sweet adventure through the wonderful Candy Kingdom. With easy to play interface in which all you have to do is switch and match your way through hundreds of levels this is one app bound to get your kids' attention. Be beware of its addictiveness, but at the same time, just let your kids enjoy the game.

Travel

your heart out!

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Top 10 Waterfront Abodes

Barefoot in the sand, underwater games, deep sea diving or just a river running by...
We bring you ten stunning waterfront properties in these visa-free countries.
Gift yourself a summer special getaway and with zero planning!

BY ANITA RAO KASHI



ZERO
PLANNING
HOLIDAYS!



1 COCOA ISLAND RESORT

Maldives

What: An island resort that promises not only scenic vistas but also luxurious privacy.

Why: Because Cocoa Island is a private island in the Maldives and because the resort has 33 suites located over water, allowing guests to effortlessly slip into the lagoon right outside their rooms to explore the reefs, to dive and swim. Guests can also head to the beach, a softly shelving one with powdery white sands fringed with wild sea grapes, hibiscus and palms. It is also common to see local fishing boats glide across placid water. The rooms are inspired by local fishing boats, called *dhoni* boats, which are joined by simple wooden walkways, built above the shallow ocean. For some more relaxation try the spa with its range of treatments. And when hunger pangs beckon, sample cuisine inspired by South Indian traditions. www.comohotels.com/cocoa island

Hot deal: 5-night family adventure package from US\$6,700 (approx ₹4.2 lakh) for two adults and two children inclusive of all meals, a picnic and sunset cruise.

2 MOVENPICK RESORT AND SPA

Dead Sea, Jordan

What: A spacious resort designed like an Arabic village with mud walls set amidst verdant gardens.

Why: Located on the northern shores of the Dead Sea, the resort feels less like a hotel and more like a setting in rural Arabic countryside. The walls are all mud plastered and the buildings are all squat and spaced out with

trees and flowering plants providing privacy. The rooms have beautiful mountain, garden or sea views with terraces or balconies to provide unhindered lookouts. The access to the sea is very convenient with tubs of Dead Sea mud that can be slathered on. If floating on the sea is not your thing, then the 6,000 sq ft Zara Spa with a variety of treatments is a haven of relaxation. Guests can choose from various dining options but don't forget to end your meal with Movenpick's range of ice creams. www.moevenpick-hotels.com

Hot deal: Colour your spring deal till end of May, with rooms from 102 JD (approx ₹9,020) per night with breakfast on twin share basis.

3 SANDALS ROYAL CARIBBEAN RESORT

Jamaica

What: A beach resort that amalgamates Colonial and tropical flavours with stunning backdrops of the sea.

Why: Because of the fascinating mix of cultures, architecture and food and also because guests have the access to a private island getaway that exudes luxury and exclusivity. The Orient is brought in with Bali-style cabanas and a Thai restaurant. There's also a dragon boat ride that takes guests to a secluded island full of luxury with a Tahitian-style pool, swim up bar and fresh catch grilled in a bamboo shack. You can indulge your senses in eight restaurants and eating options and work it away with scuba diving and other activities. www.sandals.com

Hot deal: Caribbean Deluxe rooms from \$258 (approx ₹15,996)

4 AMANWELLA

Tangalle, Sri Lanka

What: A beachfront resort located in a coconut grove against the glistening sea.

Why: Because it is unspoilt and spacious and makes for a divine seaside holiday. Approached by a lovely pebbled pathway that opens into terraces, the resort has just 24 suites scattered on the campus, each with a plunge pool and terrace. The suites are well separated and the resort lets guests choose to have a private time or mingle with others in the common areas such as the terraced area around the main pool. Designed by renowned architect Geoffrey Bawa, the resort is constructed from local stone, timber and terrazzo. Apart from the luxurious suites, the resort has plenty of areas for lounging or reading including a sandy beach. The restaurant provides delicious local dishes as well as an international selection while the lounge bar is ideal for sundowners or cold beer on hot afternoons. www.amanresorts.com/amanwella

Hot deal: US\$810 (approx ₹50,700) per night.

5 WATERFRONT RESORT

Pokhara, Nepal

What: A waterfront resort on the scenic Phewa lake.

Why: Located on the northern shore of the beautiful Phewa Lake in Pokhara, it provides guests with an unforgettable living experience. The rooms are elegantly comfy with lake-view balconies and are ideal for relaxation and unwinding. Catch the rising sun's rays in the mornings and watch fishermen paddling their boats close to the lake's edge laying out or pulling in their nets. Later in the day, the balcony provides the ideal seat for watching paragliders on the lake. The resort has a unique Nirvana Energy spot located under the shade of a 100-year-old giant fig tree which is perfect for lotus-eating and for watching not just the beautiful lake but ducks and geese or trying your hand at fishing. For a change, you could also go boating, horse riding, mountain biking or and paragliding. To indulge your taste buds, choose local Nepali, Indian, Chinese or Continental dishes from the resort's restaurant. www.ktmgh.com/waterfront-resort-pokhara.html

Hot deal: Double rooms from US\$145 (approx ₹9,100) inclusive of breakfast.

6 ANDILANA BEACH RESORT

Nosy Be, Madagascar

What: A resort on a jutting finger-shaped piece of land set against azure waters.

Why: Because it is located on one of the beautiful expanses of the coast with a series of stunning beaches. And if that is not enough, the resort also boasts of over 15,000 sq m of parkland that showcase the Madagascar's biodiversity. Almost all rooms have stunning sea views that change from morning to evening and guests are spoilt for culinary choice in the two restaurants. The resort offers guests plenty of excursions such as a trip to Nosy Iranja to see the turtles, to the Lokobe reserve, quad biking, snorkelling and scuba diving expeditions. www.andilanaresort.com

Hot deal: €340 (approx ₹23,200) per couple.



Salt and black mud treatments are among the most popular at Zara Spa



Movenpick Resort and Spa



Relax
in the resort's
Bali-style
cabanas

Sandals Royal Caribbean Resort



The Oberoi Udaivilas

7 THE OBEROI UDAIVILAS

Rajasthan

What: A beautiful, sprawling hotel located on the banks of Lake Pichola in Udaipur.

Why: It's not just about the lake but its location on the 200-year-old hunting grounds of the erstwhile Mewar Maharaja that provides a spectacular backdrop for one of India's most luxurious hotels. The hotel stands on 50 acres which includes a wildlife sanctuary and beautifully laid gardens skirting the lake. The hotel itself is intricately laid out with a series of connecting corridors broken by domes and walkways which stream in natural light. The rooms are indulgently spacious starting from 600 sq ft going all the way to a kingly 2,650 sq ft and are equipped with every bit of luxury designed to cocoon the guest in lavishness. There are daytime, night time and al fresco dining restaurants serving classic Indian and Rajasthani dishes while pools and a spa take care of leisure and relaxation. www.oberoihotels.com/hotels-in-udaipur/

Hot deal: ₹24,500 per night on a minimum of two night stay between April 6 2015 to June 30 2015; complimentary third night and 25 percent discount on spa therapies.

8 FLOAT HOUSE RIVER KWAI RESORT

Kanchanaburi, Thailand

What: A floating hotel on the river Kwai in Thailand's Kanchanaburi area.

Why: Because it can't get more romantic and ethereal than this. And because of the reel-life associations with the iconic Hollywood blockbuster Bridge on the River Kwai. Made from teak and bamboo and set against lush greenery, the floating hotel's rooms are designed in Thai style and all have private balcony and pier for relaxation and contemplation of the river that has historical connections. For something built on a river, the rooms are surprisingly spacious and are kitted out with luxuries found in an elegant hotel. Guests can indulge their senses and taste buds in Pontoon restaurant which serves both local Thai dishes as well as a selection of international ones. For a change of scene, head out for an elephant ride, rafting, cave exploring or just plain walks by the river banks. www.thefloathouseriverkwai.com

Hot deal: 4 night stay for a couple inclusive of breakfast and dinner at approx ₹12,700 per night.

9 GRAND COLOANE BEACH RESORT

Macau

What: A luxury hotel located on a promontory over the South China Sea.

Why: Because it is the only resort on Macau's unique Hac Sa beach with stunning sea views and panoramic views of the ocean. Guests can also take their taste buds on an adventurous journey through the five eating options which include world cuisines as well as local Cantonese fare. Golf enthusiasts are bound to have a great time here with access to an 18-hole course. Another relaxing option is the contemporary spa on the premises. www.grandcoloane.com

Hot deal: Golf weekend package from HKD 3,488 (approx ₹28,200) inclusive of transfers and access to the club house.



The floating rooms of resort are designed in Thai style

Float House River Kwai Resort



Grand Coloane Beach Resort



Lose yourself in the thrills of a 18-hole game, or just a little swing practice

10 BELMOND LA RESIDENCE

Luang Prabang, Laos

What: A beautiful hotel located high up on a hill overlooking two rivers.

Why: Because it is the only hotel in Luang Prabang that is built on Phou Vao Hill, literally the hill of the kites, as it provides a fabulous vantage point and panoramic views overlooking the breathtaking countryside and the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Luang Prabang. The town itself is beautifully preserved and features traditional Lao architecture and European colonial buildings, located at the confluence of the Mekong and Nam Kam rivers. The rooms overlook the gardens and mountains and are cosy and ideal for relaxation in addition to which guests can enjoy the rejuvenating treatments in the spa. Indulge your palate at Phou Savanh, one of the best restaurants in the area that serves the mouthwatering Laon cuisine. www.belmond.com/la-residence-phou-vao-luang-prabang/

Hot deal: From US\$345 (approx ₹22,000) for two night stay for a couple inclusive of breakfast and dinner.



Belmond La Residence

The entire excitement of just getting up and going is something else. An open mind, a sense of adventure, ably assisted by the Internet and that small power-packed device in your hand, a 3-G enabled mobile phone, can take you places. SUPRIYA SEHGAL, on how to just do it!



Confessions



of a Zero Planner

I have never been a comfort junkie. The thought of a sink-in mattress in a plush resort, a glistening pool in front of my room, a million trappings that announce luxury and a well planned itinerary never quite match up to my travel fantasies. What does get my heart racing with excitement is the element of surprise. Jumping onto any bus on reaching the bus stop, travelling without urgency and adherence to a sheet of paper and a perpetual motion of taking advice from locals as I go along. No wonder, a trip to the tiny landlocked part of Pondicherry on the west coast, Mahe, is one of my favourites to date. I had hurriedly thrust my four-day essentials (tees, rain pants, crocs) into a backpack and dashed to the bus stop after work—no itinerary in hand, no Internet on my phone. It was a Friday night and I was still reeling from a presentation that had gone awry. At Bangalore's Kempegowda Bus Stand, a frayed sign that read 'Mah' seemed to catch my attention over other alluring and unpronounceable names. I climbed onto the only bus that was scheduled for the night, completely unaware of what 'Mah' was all about. It had a catchy ring to it! It was only when I heard the conductor holler 'Mah-e' is when the mysteriously missing 'e' re-attached itself to its family and I knew exactly what my destination was. Despite the umbrella-battering incessant rain, a leech debacle and being abandoned on the road at 3 am by a hotel, the four-day trip was nothing less than fantastic. One that nourished my soul and only bolstered any future plans of travelling unplanned.

WORLD IN YOUR PALM

Mahe happened eight years ago. It would be safe to say that I was a minority in the Indian coterie of unplanned travellers. Since then, there has been rapid and significant change—the population of intrepid, zero planning travellers has certainly expanded. What has urged this graduation? The Internet has a decidedly momentous role to play in this. With a single swipe on your phone screen you can inspect, examine, compare and book anything from flights, buses, trains, hotels, cabs and plan an itinerary. Just last night, I planned my whirlwind trip from Delhi to Ranchi, with a detour to Ahmedabad and a three-day stop in Kashmir. All on the phone! It took me less than twenty minutes to arrive at the correct matrix of timings and fares. It was the same for the hotels. A fifteen minute



For many, zero planning has crossed boundaries, quite literally, with a number of countries that have visa-on-arrival and hostels that make it hassle-free to walk in. Southeast Asia is a popular destination for walk-in visas but the list is endless. Indians enjoy the luxury of travelling to about 50 countries that offer visa-on-arrival. This gives no planners like me an added advantage. Mahe was in 2006. With a career in the world of travel, things have changed significantly. I now need to plan well ahead for assignments, back up my plan with



RITU AGARWAL/WWW.INDIATODAYIMAGES.COM

research and follow calendars. I have to confess that I do leave a couple of days unplanned in my schedule now and desperately wish that I could throw in a few more each time. It's been eight years since my unplanned trip to Mahe and I think it's time to notch up the game. With more than fifty countries offering visa-on-arrival, it's time to play 'pin the tail on the donkey' at the airport instead of the bus stop. Spurring on the spirit of travelling with zero planning I am sure the formula will be a success for anywhere in the world.

VISA-ON-ARRIVAL

plunge into Trip Advisor and I had found just the right pad for my budget, veered off to Cleartrip from the same screen and even bagged a deal. The hour long meandering on these sites was ample for this extensive a plan. I even collated all my travels in the 'Passbook' application on my phone, and sent it all to my dad, who affectionately and unobtrusively trails my every move. Admittedly, this was for specific work and I have no plans to roam these cities for sightseeing and activities. But if I had to, I would have chosen the Tripigator

application for a helping hand. The easy breezy interface and intuitiveness of the app is worth a try. You plug in your travel needs by uncomplicated step-by-step filters and Tripigator throws up a personalised itinerary for you. Yes, this would steer away from 'zero planning' but would well fall into the realm of brilliant indicative help on the go—almost unplanned.

It is not only the world of applications that has an inherent zero planning DNA factored in. Some of the boutique travel outfits consider adding a few days of completely spontaneous

infusions as an essential ingredient. When Vikram Ahuja of the Bangalore-based Byond mentioned this to me, I was delighted. Even though he is personally a propagator of undesigned travels, he crafts out the most exquisite experiences with an 'insider's point of view' for destinations in India, but never forgets to plug in days that have scope for impromptu additions. That is one of the biggest allurements for his partially experimental clients from around the world. To complement this is the long list of inspiring blogs that are scattered all over the net. More than the inspiration, one is never too far away from practical tips or brilliant ideas for a destination. So if you have a free day at hand, scroll through some of the blogs and you are sure to find a great idea from those who've already treaded the trails of these destinations.

With a single swipe on your phone screen you can inspect, examine, compare and book anything from flights, buses, trains, hotels, cabs and plan an itinerary





SKY SCANNER

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VITHU

Though aimed at the safety of women, it pretty much applies to anyone who needs to holler for help.



NEELIMA VALLANGI

The relentless mountain lover, Neelima visited Ladakh in 2008 which turned her into a hopeless travel addict. www.travelwithneelima.com



SHIVYA NATH

A world wanderer, Shiva left behind the corporate life in 2011 to follow her dream of travelling the globe. www.the-shooting-star.com



MARIELLEN WARD

In love with India for nine long years, Mariellen is an award-winning travel writer based in Toronto and Delhi. www.breathedreamgo.com



SIDDHARTH JOSHI

In love with experiments, Siddharth is a designer, traveller and blogger who loves people. www.sid-thewanderer.com



CHARUKESI

11 years of travel blogging. 20 Indian states. 24 countries. Charukesi has over 250 published travel stories. www.charukesi.com



LAKSHMI SHARATH

Is a media professional, traveller, writer, blogger, photographer and has met Roger Federer. Enough said. www.lakshmisharath.com



PUNEETINDER KAUR

Story churner and magic weaver Puneetinder is the author of a fun read *Adrift: A Junket Junkie In Europe* www.cuttingloose.in

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Rajiv Pradhan: Though he plans biking, angling and camping trips for outdoor enthusiasts as the owner of Meandering India, Rajiv's recce trips are almost always without a clear plan. "That's the best way to find new and untreaded spots", he assures. A Spiti trip ranks first on his list of bloopers when he did not check the weather update and was stuck on the highway due to a landslide. With no village in sight, he soon depleted his stock of biscuits and was then at the mercy of locals passing by. A diet of contributed cucumbers and fruits got him going for two whole days. "While it was a difficult one, I wouldn't miss that experience for anything in the world", he says like a true adventurer.



Sariga & Nitin: Nitin and Sariga notched up the casual quotient of their honeymoon that masqueraded as a non-melodramatic holiday, by waking up on a balmy Kochi noon and booking tickets for Rajasthan. And return tickets after ten days. No plans. No accommodation bookings. Just flight tickets. While Sariga kept herself busy trying out new fashion accessories like the one in the picture, Nitin was the official eavesdropper at forts, chai stalls and restaurants. Stray conversations from there led them to a great sightseeing trail. Salem Singh Ki Haveli was their favourite. "This would have never featured on our itinerary if we had gone by a plan", chorus the newly weds at the success of their zero planning break.

Return to The Blue Lagoon

ISOLATED AND REMOVED FROM THE REST OF THE WORLD, THE ISLAND OF KOH KOOD IS A REFUGE FOR INTIMACY AND LUXURY. UNTAMED JUNGLE, PRISTINE BEACHES AND A STUNNING SPA RESORT TUCKED WITHIN ITS FOLDS.

TEXT BY
HARSIMRAN SHERGILL

PHOTOGRAPHER
ROHAN SHRESHTA

STYLIST
GUL GARG

HAIR & MAKE UP
BIANCA HARTKOPF

SARONG DRESS: SHIVAN & NARRESH
RING-AE-TEE DESIGNS







SHIRT-OASIS AT KOOVIS
SKIRT-PAYAL PRATAP
SANDALS-TOD'S
EARRINGS-JUST JEWELS
PALM RING-MYO DESIGNS

A sparkling white Cessna is parked at the tarmac and two dashing pilots are making their final checks. Our private ride to the Southeastern region of Trat in Thailand from Bangkok. We are soon flying over virgin islands basking under a clear blue sky, luxury yachts lazily making their way through azure waters... ninety minutes of ecstasy in the air. Even before I can soak in the views below, we are landing at the **Island of Koh Kood**. The landing is drama by itself. The smallest runway I've seen in my life! So, this is how the rich and famous live. The stunning, secluded, **Soneva Kiri resort** is luxury at its best and that this private island is going to be my abode for the next few days makes me feel a bit like Paris Hilton.

At the pier the hotel team waits dressed in white shirts, shorts and no shoes! Welcome to the "Slow Life" says General Manager Graham Grant welcoming us. Barefoot in the sand we are then during our stint at Soneva, and our cover personality actor **Kalki Kochelin** has no problems whatsoever kicking off them shoes, being the absolute water baby that she turns out to be!

(Clockwise from left) Kalki strikes a pose at The View; One of the many floating islands along the way; The charter takes off to shuttle guests; The welcome team at the pier



PHOTOGRAPHS BY AMIT KUMAR/WWW.INDIATODAYIMAGES.COM

Kalki's **Beach Front Pool Villa Suite** comes generously equipped with a master bedroom with a walk-through dressing area and bathroom, a half-moon infinity-edged swimming pool with direct access to the beach and various large terraced areas with sun loungers. This **No Shoes, No News Resort** turns us all into dreamy-eyed romantics as over the next few days we walk the pier watching the sunset, catch a mushy film at the gorgeous open air **Cinema Paradiso**, eat in tree pods overlooking the vast waters of the Gulf of Siam, go greedy in the resort's fabulous **Chocolate Room** or simply soak in the amazing surrounds from the all day dinning called what else, but **The View**.

For a property that celebrates every aspect of life with eco luxury, dining at their signature restaurant **The View** is intimate yet dramatic with gorgeous views of the setting sun over the horizon. It happens to be Kalki's birthday and we are all geared up for a celebration. The restaurant's Executive Chef takes us on a mind blowing culinary feast paired with some world-class wines. This modern bistro specializes in cooking with the freshest locally sourced ingredients prepared using western techniques. The menu changes daily according to the seasons and fresh products available in the market.

As the night melts into the waters around us, the conversation and mood

(Clockwise from top) An aerial view of Soneva Kiri; Kalki in her many moods; So Spirited, the poolside bar overlooks the sea; An intimate setup at the beach; A chic villa in pastel shades



AMIT KUMAR/WWW.INDIA TODAY IMAGES.COM





Wake up in a sea-facing bedroom in the Private Cliff Pool Reserve or Villa 33; Kalki takes a stroll at the beach, which is also a perfect place to enjoy an intimate dinner

ORGANZA SHEER JACKET -
NOT SO SERIOUS BY PALLAVI MOHAN
MAILLOT-SHIVAN & NARRESH
EARRINGS-MYO DESIGNS
RING- AE-TEE DESIGNS



FRINGED COVER UP-ANUPAMAA
SHORTS-FOREVER 21
BRACELET-MYO DESIGNS
CROPPED TOP-MODEL'S OWN



much mellowed with all the food and wine veers off to films, work and travel. Kalki goes nostalgic, “As children we travelled a lot, but it wasn’t about luxury holidays. My dad loved to take us hiking, camping in the forest, mountaineering, which I absolutely loved. Even though my parents didn’t follow any conventional methods of parenting, they are both highly evolved individuals.”

She is now melancholic as she opens up, “Do you know my father never had any formal education, yet he is an engineer who up till a few years back, was making and selling microlights! And my mother, she teaches French and is a full time worker and devotee at the Aurobindo Ashram in Pondicherry.”

Unconventional, that’s the word. I have been wondering what makes Kalki stand out in the crowd. Did you know that she has a fierce love for theatre and that this year will mark her venture into the role of a director for a play that she has also written! “Theatre has been a part of my life since I was in a boarding school in Ooty. One of my school teachers, Mrs Dodds inculcated a love for the stage in me,” and that became the core of her education at Goldsmith’s England. It is easy to get lost in Kalki’s story, but the many wonders at this amazing resort are beckoning.

The night sky over



(Clockwise from top) Kalki enjoys a wine tasting session with Vladamir, the in-house sommelier; Breakfast the unforgettable Treepod; Our cover girl gets a masterclass at The Beach; the desserts at Soneva are an absolute must-not-miss



HARSIMRAN SHERGILL/WWW.INDIATODAYIMAGES.COM





HARSHIRAN SHERGILL/WWW.INDIA TODAY IMAGES.COM



Embark on a culinary journey at Benz's as chef Khun Benz weaves here magic using ingredients grown in Koh Kood and neighbouring Koh Chang. The salads are lights while the meals hearty

Soneva is crystal clear, like a beautiful black sari stretched over us embellished with glittering stones. We walk up a narrow flight of steps to get to **The Observatory**. I am a little surprised that a leisure resort would offer such

a state of the art set-up. But as a friendly English stargazer starts pointing out constellations, counting the moons of Jupiter and peering at the graceful halo of Saturn's translucent ring, Kalki and I are both soon engrossed in the many

mysterious universes that lie far, far away.

The idea of slow life intrigues me...as the stress of Gurgaon to Noida daily drives, work chaos and deadlines seeps out of me, I try to understand this philosophy. I am told that it translates to much more than just taking things slow. Started by **Sonu Shirdasani** and with his beautiful wife **Eva Malmström Shirdasani**, once a model now the hospitality group's Creative Director, Soneva Kiri is an amalgamation of Sonu and Eva's hunt for an environmentally responsible lifestyle that took route in the Maldivian blues way back in 1995. When the couple built Soneva Fushi as a home on the deserted island of Kunfunadhoo in the Maldives, they had no idea that their intensely personal vision would form the basis of a successful collection of world-class spas resorts based on the ideology of **Sustainable-Local-Organic-Wellness Learning-Inspiring-Fun-Experiences**.

Next day brings an unforgettable, dramatic experience: the **Tree pod dining**. Set high among the tree tops, the tree pod dining hangs 16 ft above the ground and is surrounded by lush tree tops and views of sandy beaches & blue waters. The pod is constructed with a rigid frame that is wrapped in woven rattan and can accommodate up to four diners. What a setting! My imagination is already running wild. This calls for a handsome hunk and a romantic proposal even as a server flies in from one end to deliver baskets of food and drink over a **zipline**, with rustle of leaves, a beautiful breeze and birdsong keeping us company.

The resort also has other stunning dining options like the **Dining Room**, an elegant waterhole for guests called **So Spirited**, but the tree pod has honestly ruined me for life. The **Benz's restaurant** does come pretty close. We cruise through the mangroves of Klong Yai Kee to get to this open-air lantern-lit eatery on stilts. This signature Thai gourmet restaurant is helmed by **chef Khun Benz** discovered by Sonu and Eva many moons ago in Phang-Nga and the cooking involves farm to fork experiences with ingredients grown here on Koh Kood and neighbouring Koh Chang.

The shoot, the subject, the location and the story seamless blend and our slow days fly away too fast. Time seems to stand still and yet in the same instance seems too short to unravel all the mysteries of this island, like trying to understand Kalki's layered personality—a fine actor, thinker, free spirit, theatre lover... To describe her in a sentence is like reading just one paragraph from a Whitman poem. Incomplete. I wonder how successful are the many paragraphs I have written above in an attempt to describe the magic of Koh Kood, Soneva and Kalki Koehlin.



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Private Koh Kood Discovery

Journey past villages and disembark amongst the mangroves. Follow the river to Klong Chao waterfall and swim beneath the cascades. Then wind through the island to the fishing village, Ao Salad on the northeast shore. See life as the locals live it, and meet some of the men and women who bring us the most delectable fresh catches of the day.

Benz Cooking Class

Guests can delight in Chef Benz's lavish nine-course menus of Thai delicacies, and each is inspired just hours before it is served. Journey with her to the local market as she picks the best and brightest, and the menu takes shape in her culinary imagination. Then let her lead you in creating exquisite Thai dishes.

Private Snorkelling and Picnic

Jet set to **Koh Rang National Marine Park** on a speed boat and slide beneath the waves into the world of tropical fish and corals. Get amazed by your very own private beach for a picnic on white sands. After a leisurely lunch, plunge into the crystal waters of the bay for a refreshing swim, then enjoy a scenic cruise back to the resort, taking in the surrounding islands along the way.

Diving

The **Koh Chang National Park** offers two-dozen dive sites down to 30 metres though much of the more colourful coral thrives closer to the surface, around 12 metres. Join experienced masters lead the way underwater to blue spotted sting rays, angelfish, fusiliers, sweet lips, moral eels, turtles and schools of banner of fish.

An afternoon at the Den

Holidaying with kids? Then head to the Den that is a giant moulded bamboo playground shaped like a manta ray. It's dedicated to learning, to excitement and to meaningful experiences. Professional child minders pique your kid's imaginations, teaching them to play Thai instruments, paintings and the visual arts, and carefully watch while you can laze around at the beach. The resort also organises father-son Koh Kood Fishing trips and mother and daughter spa sessions.

AT A GLANCE

GETTING THERE We flew Thai Airways. There are direct flights to Bangkok from both New Delhi and Mumbai. The flying time is 5 hours approx and an additional 90-minutes chartered flight to the Island of Koh Kood. The island is located 350 km southeast of Bangkok.

ROUND ECONOMY FARE ₹43,000 approx

GOOD TO KNOW The domestic airport is about 25 minutes away from the international one. Keep a reasonable amount of time for transferring between the two and also keep in mind that Bangkok traffic can get pretty nasty. The hotel organises transfers that go a long way in saving precious time.

CURRENCY ₹100 = 52 Thai Baht approx

CONTACT Soneva Kiri, 110 Moo 4, Koh Kood Sub-District, Koh Kood District, Trat 23000, Thailand; email: reservations-kiri@soneva.com; tel +66 (0) 82 208 8888; www.soneva.com

COST: Starts at US\$ 1,100 approx



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NECKLACE-AE-TEE DESIGNS
RING-MYO DESIGNS

Day Trip to Ao Salat Village

Koh Kood is Thailand as it was years ago—untamed jungle, pristine beaches, fishermen going about their business, ancient Siam at peace with itself. Located some 350 km southeast of Bangkok, it is the fourth largest island in the country. We decide to venture into town to the fishing village of Ao Salat, for a glimpse into the lives of the locals. Not far from the resort, this picturesque village floating entirely on stilts is where the town gathers for the day's catch. While Kalki stumbles upon a fresh catch of crabs, the fishermen are more than happy to take her through the process of fishing and cleaning. All along the village are make-shift grocery stores that double as local watering hole by the night. After several impromptu invitations, we decide to visit the nearby Temple that houses an insane number of felines and a large gold statue of Buddha. Though there isn't much to see and do around here, but if you are upto some unfussy Thai food and drinks, and a boat ride into tranquility then a day trip Ao Salat is a must. It has a few small make-shift sea food restaurants (and a souvenir shop) where you can choose your own seafood straight from the fishing-nets. The village can be reached by motorbike or locals are more than happy to give you a ride. Else you could also request the hotel to arrange a car. This is also the departure and arrival terminal for the Koh Kood Princess ferry.



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(Left) The Ao Salat fishing village is where the town gathers for the day's catch. During the trip Kalki encounters a toddler besotted by the star; A typical scene at the village during dusk

(Right) An elderly couple pose for the shutterbugs while our cover girl takes a bow in front of the massive Buddha statue at the village



Good Morning Vietnam



A lone boatman rows a boat through the Yen stream that's filled with lotus blooms on the way to Huong pagoda



SHUTTERSTOCK

The English language may not find too many takers in Vietnam, but the language of forgiveness is spoken loud and clear in this Buddhist nation, says NISHIRAJ A. BARUAH

I am in Hanoi, Vietnam's lush-green Capital, as part of a delegation with Leh-based His Holiness The Gyalwang Drukpa, head of the 1,000-year-old Drukpa Order in the Himalayas. "Make way! Give way," the cops holler on a megaphone. Going with The Drukpa-accorded VVIP treatment has certain perks. I can't help feeling self-important as we speed up towards the festival venue, **Ninh Binh province**, three hours from **Hanoi**. The convoy of 32 Lexus GX460 SUVs is being led and followed by police escort vehicles, sirens blazing, red light flashing. Soon the countryside reveals itself in glorious greens. The ubiquitous stainless-steel rooftop water tanks shine brilliantly in the sun. The paddy fields—Vietnam is the rice bowl of the world—on either side of the highway are balm for the eyes.

And yet, this quiet, serene and peace loving country was once a war zone, Agent Orange (sarin gas) and bombs unleashed on its people by the French and the Americans for no fault of theirs.

BAI DINH TEMPLE COMPLEX

Bai Dinh Temple complex, where the event is taking place, is buzzing with excitement. Shaven-headed monks in maroon have descended from over 100 nations to celebrate this festival that, apart from serving as a spiritual, cultural, academic, diplomatic and economic connect with the world, also promotes tourism in Vietnam. The international press is there in full force. "Are you from the media?" I ask a tall Egyptian woman with a camera. "No," she says, "I have come to pick up Buddhist techniques for a therapy clinic I run in Cairo." Meanwhile, His Holiness in John Lennon glasses gets a rock star's welcome. Followers who want to touch him almost mob him, before he manages to seat himself in the VVIP front row. Vietnam's deputy PM and various state ministers come to meet and greet the Drukpa.

TAM COC MOUNTAIN COMPLEX

Bai Dinh Temple complex is a sacred place for Buddhists worldwide. Three large copper Buddha statues, each weighing fifty tons, stand imposingly. The panoramic **Tam Coc mountain complex** is so pretty that my



At the Old Quarter, it is common to see women dressed in the latest street fashion

SRIRAM VITTALAMURT



SHUTTERSTOCK

A farmer ports flowers to the local market in Hanoi



A restaurant that has opened in a restored colonial home

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SECRET

BIA HOI CORNER

The Old Quarter is a maze of lanes and intersections, crowded with two wheelers, cycles, cars and vendors that navigating your way is a task. I discovered Bia Hoi Corner at the intersection of **Ta Hien** and **Luong Ngoc Quyen street**. The place is scattered with dozens of watering holes with tourists and college students seated by the roadside. The locally brewed beer and dirt-cheap prices attract all. This is where you experience the high energy of traditional Hanoi over drinks and local food. You can also break into a street dance for some impromptu gigs

friend, a conflict-zone photographer, whose office juggles between Kashmir, Kabul, Baghdad and Beirut, exclaim: "I so needed this break. Covering these conflicts kills a part of you. You cannot remain untouched when you see children and women being killed in front of your eyes. You feel the world is an ugly place. It's easy to forget that the world can also be as pretty as this."

The day long celebrations will continue but we would be better off also exploring other sights and sounds of Hanoi. Off we go to **Ho Chi Minh Memorial** at the centre of the city. The revolutionary is to Vietnam what Gandhi is to Indians. Despite the humid heat, it was full of tourists. We check out the touristy stalls and the shops at the **French Quarter**, an area that looks exactly like Paris, but for reasonably priced shopping the Old Quarter markets are the place.

OLD QUARTER

The Old Quarter is a thriving, buzzing market. Its narrow lanes are chaotic like Delhi's Chandni Chowk, crowded by women in scooters and men in mopeds. Because of the slow traffic, people avoid motorcycles and bikes. Each lane specialises in only one commodity: Shoe lane, bag lane, a lane for eateries, eyewear, and so on. By night, the place is lit by red neons. I stumble upon a beer lane where huddled in small groups, college students and tourists seat by the roadside on low stools. The locally brewed beer and dirt-cheap prices attract all and sundry. But just when we are making ourselves comfortable, an agitated woman barks us out of the place. A police van is on its way and the owners will be fined for encroaching into the street.

Encroachment is just about all the crime that takes place in Hanoi. Women walk free without fear at the **weekend night market**. Selling Chinese products, there is no end to the endless rows of stalls. I can't resist splurging a few millions. A traditional Vietnamese hat, symbolic of Vietnam costs 5 million. Come rain or sunshine, these straw hats have survived the plastic onslaught and continue to grace the Vietnamese heads. I also buy a two-wheeler helmet styled after the Vietnamese army. That cost me 10 million! Several other shops sell artifacts and posters from the wars.

On the way we stop at a craft factory where orphaned and specially-abled children churn out incredible pieces of paintings and sculptures in fine embroidery, limestone and lacquer. A salesgirl follows me around. "You like this? U wan to buy?" she asks. She seems more keen on

Ha Long Bay is
one of the seven
wonders of the
natural world





SHUTTERSTOCK

conversing with me than selling. “How to speak good English?” she asks finally. “You already speak better than others,” I tell her. She is flattered and rewards me with a wide, smile. I advise her to watch English news on TV. “You can also practice by talking to your reflection in front of a mirror,” I suggest. This sounds so silly to her that she doubles up in a laughing fit.

HA LONG BAY

We are soon at **Ha Long Bay**, one of the seven wonders of the natural world. We climb into an empty 100-seater ferry entirely at our disposal. The perks of being in the Drukpa entourage! Oysters, lobsters, fish, prawns, beer and wine are served, as we enjoy the astounding spectacle of more than 2,000 hillocks working as beauty spots on the blue-emerald face of the **South China Sea**. Hundreds of pleasure boats trail the sea. In the house boats, families and honeymooners stay overnight. We dock at one of limestone islands and climb 100 steps to enter a cave made of stalactites and stalagmites. Creative lighting illuminates its crevices. The guide shoots a laser beam to point out the forms: that one is like a tortoise (hence the money on it), and that looks like a horse, dragon or a cobra. These caves were accidentally discovered by a fisherman taking shelter in the island during a storm. Another island has been developed into a resort complex.

Finally we drive back to the hotel. The sun slowly sinks behind the sprawling paddy fields. The stainless-steel water tanks on the roofs now bask in its orange glow. Small towns pass by. The language problem continues to dog us till the end—though that has never stopped tourists, mostly Americans—many of whom come here to see the country where their fathers and grandfathers fought. So do they harbour any grudges against them? “Not at all,” says our guide adding “Buddhism teaches us to forget and forgive. His Highness Gyalwang Drukpa couldn’t agree more saying “That’s the language, not English, a nation needs to know to communicate with the world.”

AT A GLANCE



Good to know: Currency: ₹200 make 1 million Dongs.



Shop: For pearls at Halong Bay, a two hour ride off Hanoi. The area is amongst best in the world to buy pearls. Also World War II memorabilia like helmets, vintage posters; the traditional Vietnamese straw hat, paintings and sculptures in fine embroidery,

limestone and lacquer.



Stay: At the Sheraton Hanoi Hotel, K5 Nghi Tam, 11 Xuan Dieu Road, Tay Ho District, Hanoi, Vietnam. Tel: 84-4-3719-9000. www.SheratonHanoi.com



How to reach: There are no direct flights from India, but the shortest route from New Delhi to Hanoi is via China Southern with a 2

hour 35 minute transit time at Guangzhou. Thai Airways also operates regular flights with a stopover at Bangkok. Return fare starts at ₹30,000 onwards.



Best time: April and May. This is the time of year when you can sit in a cafe with a view enjoying a coffee or beer without dripping with sweat.



Eat: At Bobby Chinn's (1 Ba Trieu Street, Hanoi; 00 84 4 934 8577; BobbyChinn.com). Owned by the eponymous celebrity chef, Bobby Chinn's is packed with expats and visitors. For international cuisine, try La Verticale, the signature restaurant of French Chef Didier Corlou, La Verticale (19 Ngo Van So, Hoan Kiem District, Hanoi; +84 4 944 6317)



1



2



3



4

1. It is offroad most of the way but that adds to the thrill of the ride
2. Men from the Yimchunger tribe singing traditional songs
3. Aircraft parts can be seen scattered around the area, some still shiny after all these years
4. A local woman strikes a pose
5. A woman lights up the fire for evening tea in a local village
6. The ride, past men at work in the fields, is filled with scenic wonders



5



6

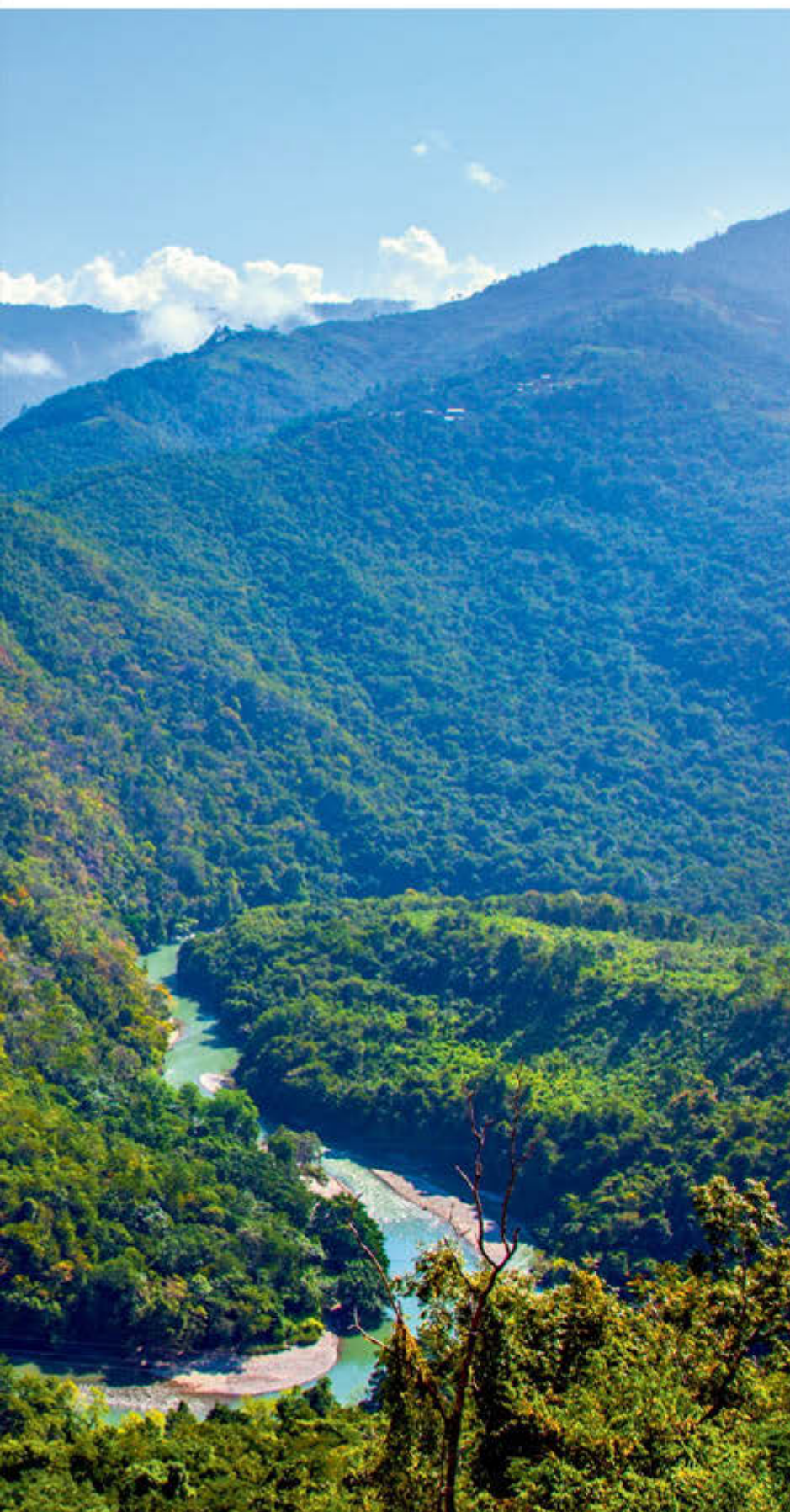
A Plane In The Jungle

A chance pit stop for shelter turns into a discovery of a lifetime.
SHAHWAR HUSSAIN recalls the magical moment of stumbling upon
remains of pre-World War II aircrafts that had crashed in the jungles of
Nagaland. Photographs: **ANUJ SINGH**





The Zink River makes its way to Chindwin in Myanmar



The sky had promised rain since dawn and when the clouds opened up in the afternoon, it poured cats and dogs. Big blobs of rain stung my face, forcing me to take shelter in a shed by the roadside. In Nagaland, you will find sheds like these all over. They are meant to shelter villagers who walk long distances to get to town.

There were a few old men in the shed waiting for the rain to stop so that they could carry on home. But the rain gods had different plans and so one of the men got a fire going. He put a piece of bamboo in the fire with water and tea leaves and let it boil. I got talking with them as the man poured strong black tea in a bamboo mug for me and offered me a hand-rolled cigarette. The man who spoke the least, said the most interesting thing which set my mind racing. As I strapped on my helmet when the sky held, the drone of an aircraft drifted down to us from afar. He looked heavenwards and said “I hope this won’t fall like the plane in the jungle.” Removing my helmet in a flash I asked “plane in the jungle?” And the man casually replied saying he’d once seen the remains of an airplane in the jungles many years back.

An airplane in the jungles—he pointed to the blue mountains yonder and said it lay beyond the third range of mountains. Vague, but I will trace it, I thought to myself. Tracing it out was easier said than done. It took the jungle nine long years to share its secret with me. I got to know that the remains of the airplane lay scattered over a large area under the jurisdiction of a new village named Tsurevong.

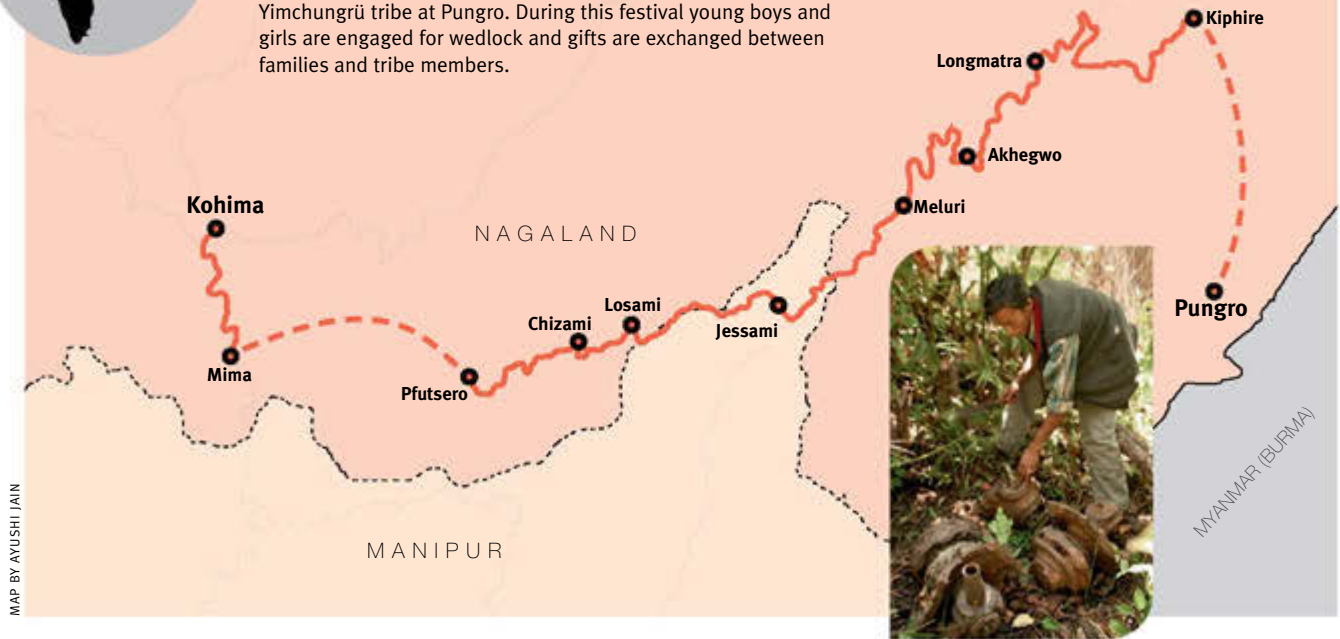
My photographer friend, Anuj and I decided that motorcycle was the best way to travel to these far flung villages where you can see life in all its rustic glory. A few kilometres out of Kohima, we crossed villages like Mima, Cakhabama, Pfutsero, Chizami, Losami, Lanye, Jessami, Meluri, Akhegwo, Longmatra; we then bypassed Kiphire town and went onto Pungro. As we approached Pungro, I watched the beautiful Zinkri River flowing gently and then disappearing across a bend as it made its way to the Chindwin River in Myanmar.

By village standards, we reached late, and Thronghokiy, a teacher at the local school, put us up in the newly built government guest house where we



METEMNEO FESTIVAL

Plan your trip to Nagaland around the second week of August, so that you can catch Metemneo, a harvest festival celebrated by the Yimchungrü tribe at Pungro. During this festival young boys and girls are engaged for wedlock and gifts are exchanged between families and tribe members.



feasted on delicious fish curry made by his wife. The next morning, the last of the 45 km to Tsurevong village were spent offroading. Meanwhile Throughokiy had sent word to the village and said someone would wait for us along the way. K. Athong, a village head (Gaon Bura) met us on the way and led us to the village. Tsurevong is a new village, with only 38 households, was set up a couple of years back. Cool wind from the mountains descended upon us as we sat outside the headman's house sipping sweet tea. I waited impatiently to meet old man Kimusai, the only man who had seen the aircraft come down in flames from close quarters.

As I finished my third cup of tea, the old man appeared. He was in his 90s but he walked straight and although he carried his long red walking stick, he never really seemed to use it. Kimusai and I sat on a large rock as he narrated the story. His memory was sharp and he spoke as if it happened just yesterday. It was in late 1942, Kimusai lived in Salomi village and he wanted to treat his new bride with a wild boar feast. In fading light, Kimusai stood under a tree at the very top of a hill when he heard a loud wailing sound. He explains "I saw a giant bird with its wing on fire circling close overhead. It was crying out loudly".

As he watched, the circling plane narrowly missed a hillock and an instant later came down in the forest just below the hill where he was standing.

"There were a thousand fires and it made an ear splitting noise as if the moon has come crashing down on earth!" said Kimusai. He was a brave hunter and a warrior but he had never ever seen such a massive explosion so close. He dropped his kill and ran all the way to the village.

The burning aircraft was seen as a message that the Gods were angry. Prayers were held, *mithuns* were sacrificed and nobody was allowed to hunt. In a few days' time, the village started running out of food and livestock. So Kimusai and a couple of hunters decided to investigate the giant bird.

They had never seen an aircraft before but knew that it was not some bird fallen from the heavens.

As they cautiously made their way through the debris, they found human remains of three dead bodies. Kimusai and the others buried the three airmen some distance away from the aircraft. They collected a few things from the site including a gun and didn't return there for many years.

"The place was haunted by the

spirits of the men who died there" Kimusai said. He didn't specify how and I didn't ask anymore. It was most probably a C-47 transport plane that had taken off from Chabua Airbase in Assam. Before the United States were officially engaged in World War II, American pilots flew these supplies planes across the high snow covered jagged peaks of Himalayas to ferry supply to the armies of Chiang Kai-shek in Kunming in western China who was fighting against the Imperial Japanese army. Like so many others, this plane never made it back to base after dropping its cargo in Kunming.

The evergreen jungle soon overgrew the area and it was only in 1967 that the villagers ventured into the area again. Kimusai shifted to a new village, Longkhimvong, which was being established some kilometres away from the crash site and led the villagers to the aircraft. They started clearing the forest for cultivation and the huge bulk of the downed aircraft was revealed.

Kimusai is a great story teller and by the time he finished, the sun had gone down the hill and the skies turned a flaming red. He had a faraway look in his eyes as he stood up with a deep sigh and made his way home.

That night we stayed at a community



SKYWAY TO HELL & THE HUMP

Pre-World War II, this infamous route was nicknamed 'The Hump' and 'Skyway To Hell' by the brave airmen who flew the planes. These sorties were fraught with danger. The planes were up against natural elements like snow and 200 mph wind and also the Japanese Zero fighter planes. More than 700 planes went down in this region during the war. Some fell in the deep jungles of Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur and Burma.



Women are often spotted making pottery in Mimi

hut by the village church. Dinner was rice, boiled vegetables and meat of some jungle fowl. The headman's wife made some jungle fowl soup which was unbelievably delicious. We sat in the kitchen by the fire and ate the simple food served with a liberal dose of affection. The concept of breakfast as the world knows it does not exist in most of Nagaland. So at 7 am, we were served rice and vegetable and with a full stomach, we made our way to the much-awaited crash site.

The site was a few kilometres downhill from the village. We headed there with Thuviki and Retringia leading the way. The fact that some parts of the forest were burnt off recently for jhum cultivation made things a bit easier for us. It was evident that the villagers had not burnt the forest at the crash site for a few years. Retringia slashed a path with his razor sharp machete and we followed close behind. It was deadly quiet except for the occasional call of the lone eagle that circled the sky.

Along the way, we found still shiny landing gear, some twisted wheels, parts of gearbox, crankshafts, a fan of some sort and some other heavy parts scattered over a very large area. We walked down stream, slashing away the thick foliage and found a number of

large engine parts. I am sure a concentrated search would reveal a whole lot of parts.

Even though the area had been burnt and cleared in the past, we were surprised to find pieces of unburnt fabric and rubber hose pipes scattered in the area. A whole lot of parts are buried underground and some keep popping up during cultivation almost every year. A couple of years back, a villager dug up an old radio set and a rusted and loaded revolver!


It is an overwhelming sense of discovery—for something that I have searched for for a very long time. The fact that the headman told me that I was the first person from mainland India to visit the site made it even more satisfying. As I sat on a fallen tree and looked down the valley, I couldn't help but imagine the plight of the crew as they came down in flames. Even if they had survived the crash, it would have been near impossible for the wounded to survive the dense jungle crawling with wildlife. After half a century, nobody knew where the three graves were but I said a silent prayer for the men who died so far away from their homeland.


The remains lay in a far and obscure place but it is well worth a visit. It makes civilians realise the plight of soldiers. If


you are visiting Tsurevong, travel another 25 km and visit the village of Mimi on the borders of Myanmar. I was fortunate to see the villagers harvest honey from hives of the rock bee. It is harvested twice a year, in April and in October. There were 85 hives on a sheer rockface with a 300 ft vertical drop; the villagers harvested honey using traditional means. Scary but interesting—and the honey tasted just great!

Mimi has a tradition of making pottery mostly by women and they do not use the traditional wheel. They beat the clay by a wooden plank and shape it up into all sizes of pots. They also make some fabulous smoking pipes. I bought a pot of honey fresh from the hive and the earthen pot had the inscription "Made In Mimi."

AT A GLANCE

 **Good to know:** Contact: Lisapila Anar, P.R.O. Tourism Department, Nagaland; Nagaland House, New Delhi
For adventure motorcycling through these interiors: Contact: Chain Reaction; Tel: (o) 98103 20041; www.chainreactionindia.com
Entry Requirements: Indians need Inner Line Permits and one can get them from the Nagaland House at New Delhi, Kolkata, Guwahati and from the DCs office at Dimapur.
Foreigners need to report at the police station at Dimapur and also at the police stations of the towns they visit.
Money: Only cash. Credit and debit cards are just 4 inch pieces of coloured plastic.

 **Stay:** There are various good hotels at Kohima to choose from but beyond that it is only home stays and a few government guest houses like in Pungro. Expect simple accommodation and local food. Contact PRO Tourism if you decide to go.

 **Best Time:** October to April is the best time to visit.

You need not move far to appreciate extraordinary nature, sight some wildlife, or to marvel at the stunning silence around. A riverside camp deep within the forests, fringing Kanha National Park, can prove to be both an adventure or a soul soothing sojourn. BY RITU AGARWAL



A beautifully lit retreat by the river is perfect for romantic evenings;
(Right) The rooms and bathrooms overlook the forest

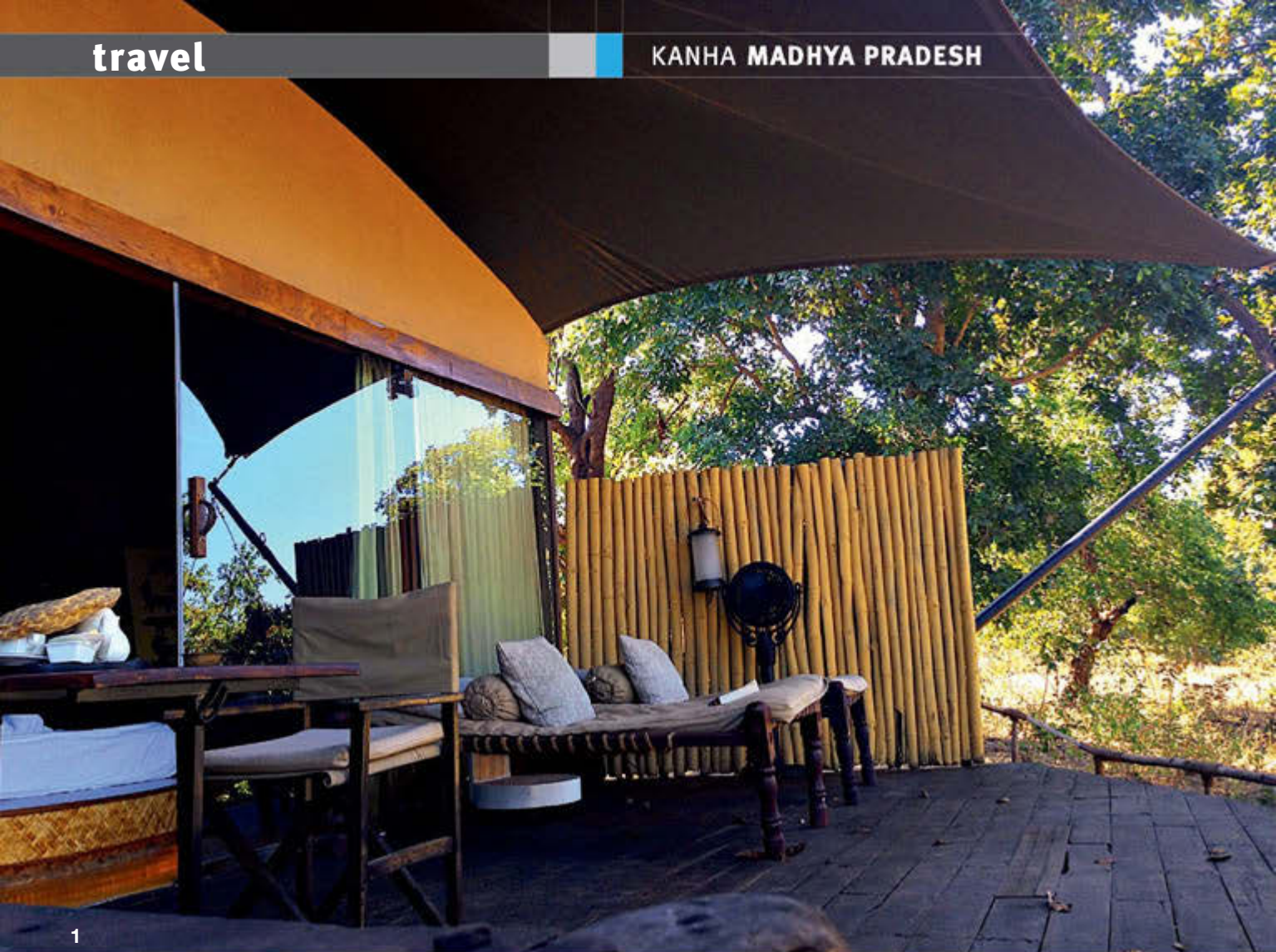
RUN WILD RUN FREE



There is something about setting out on a tiger trail holiday. I can never describe it. The energy and excitement around me is palpable as I set out. So one early February morning, as we wake-up at the crack of dawn to catch a flight to Nagpur and begin our journey to the bowels of Madhya Pradesh's renowned jungles, I can almost feel the air crackle.

Kanha is one of India's largest national parks covering 2,000 sq km and is located in the Maikal Hills of the Satpura Hill range in MP. Edging this park, situated along the Banjar river, stands the **Banjaar Tola Camp** run by Taj Safaris. We turn off the main road into the forests and our phones silently die on us. No network! As we get off the vehicle to be greeted with fresh lime water and cold towels by Amit, the camp manager, the first desperate question we ask, "is there Wi-Fi in the rooms?" He smirks. "No. Switch off those cellphones. Soak in your surroundings. You may even be able to spot a variety of wildlife across the river, right from your tent. The river is used as a watering hole by animals, and also by the largest population of tigers in India!"

We sigh and give in. Cellphones are chucked into the safe provided within the luxuriously appointed tents—which are to house us over the next couple of days—and are completely forgotten. The property has two camps situated along the river in a manner ensuring a fabulous view to each, yet providing a feeling of total privacy. The lightweight tents have been designed in



1



2

MUST DO

- A spa treatment on your private deck.
- A dinner by the river, under a tree aglow with lanterns.
- Dance with the tribal folk.
- Birding—give the poor tiger a break.



3





4

SHUTTERSTOCK

1. Plenty of animal spotting can be done from the comfortable outdoor deck
2. A sumptuous breakfast by the greens 3. The interiors are warm and done up in pastel shades 4. A pair of playful young tigers spotted near the river. In summer, a large variety of animals congregate at this wateringhole

a contemporary style canvas wall panel, gorgeous bamboo floors and locally crafted furniture. Each tent opens out to a huge viewing deck which overlooks the river on one end and the national park on the other side. Each camp has nine tented rooms that share common facilities like dining, lounge, swimming pool and a spa.

My companion's aim was the forest and mine was a mix of chilling and maybe **spotting a tiger**. Banjaar Tola turns out to be heaven for both. I refuse to wake up crazy early next morning as the safari vehicles need to dock at the park gate before sunrise to ensure smooth entry. So while she goes haring off in bone chilling cold all toggled out with a fancy camera, I snuggle deeper into my very cosy, electrically heated fluffy mattress. I wake up at leisure, call in for tea and toast which is set up on my viewing deck. It is a beautiful, sunny day. Each tent has been carefully pitched to provide guests with a spectacular view of the river which is dried up right now, yet as I sit out and take in deep breaths of fresh air; surrounded by Sal trees, boulders and bamboo groves, I feel every ache, pain and stress in my system simply melt away. Nestled between trees on a small hilly outcrop is the common facility where we head for lunch. The deck here has a dropped ledge with a railing so that nothing comes between the guest and the river view. We eat a light meal with soup, salad, some grilled chicken and

vegetables and get set to leave for the **afternoon safari**.


The park has beautiful areas of Sal forests, large bamboo stretches and lush green meadows. Herds of spotted deer, *gaur*, *sambar* and the endangered barasingha are all fairly generous with their *darshan*. We also spot an occasional wild boar. The park stretches over 940 sq km in dramatic natural splendour which hides within its folds the ever so elusive tiger. We spot lovely birds, as our naturalist is quick at pointing out rare ones atop tall trees as he hands over the binoculars so that we get close ups of eagles and kites, storks, teals, pintails, herons and egrets...

The camp also arranges lunches and dinners at various scenic spots within their sprawling 60 acre campus. Dinner may be served in the forest, lit by hundreds of lanterns, and is also occasionally accompanied by traditional dancing and singing. We opt for a **setup on our private deck**. It is beautiful. We sit surrounded with lanterns and flowers, eating a thali dinner featuring a selection of regional dishes surrounded by the darkness of the forest. It is eerie and exciting at the same time.


On the next day's safari there is a young British couple with the wife visibly pregnant on a "babymoon" to India... they've been on continuous trips to the forest over their last three days in the camp. But the mighty beast has stayed elusive. Today is their last chance and they are sounding so sad and so

woeful that we send out a little prayer to the Gods above. And of course, the Gods always take care of their flock... After tracking and trailing and winding through many dusty paths just as the sun is starting to set over the horizon, we get our magic moment. The dinner that night at the camp is a celebration for those who have returned triumphant with curious queries from the disappointed lot and enthusiastic babble from the new comers who will be setting out on their first safari the next morning. The staff is wonderful and caring. The lodge chef comes around chatting up the guests and offering **impromptu cooking lessons** to those inclined. But me, I am only inclined to sit on the deck reading a book, sipping a drink as the jungle breathes around me. Or, go for a walk down by the river. Life never felt more uncomplicated.


AT A GLANCE

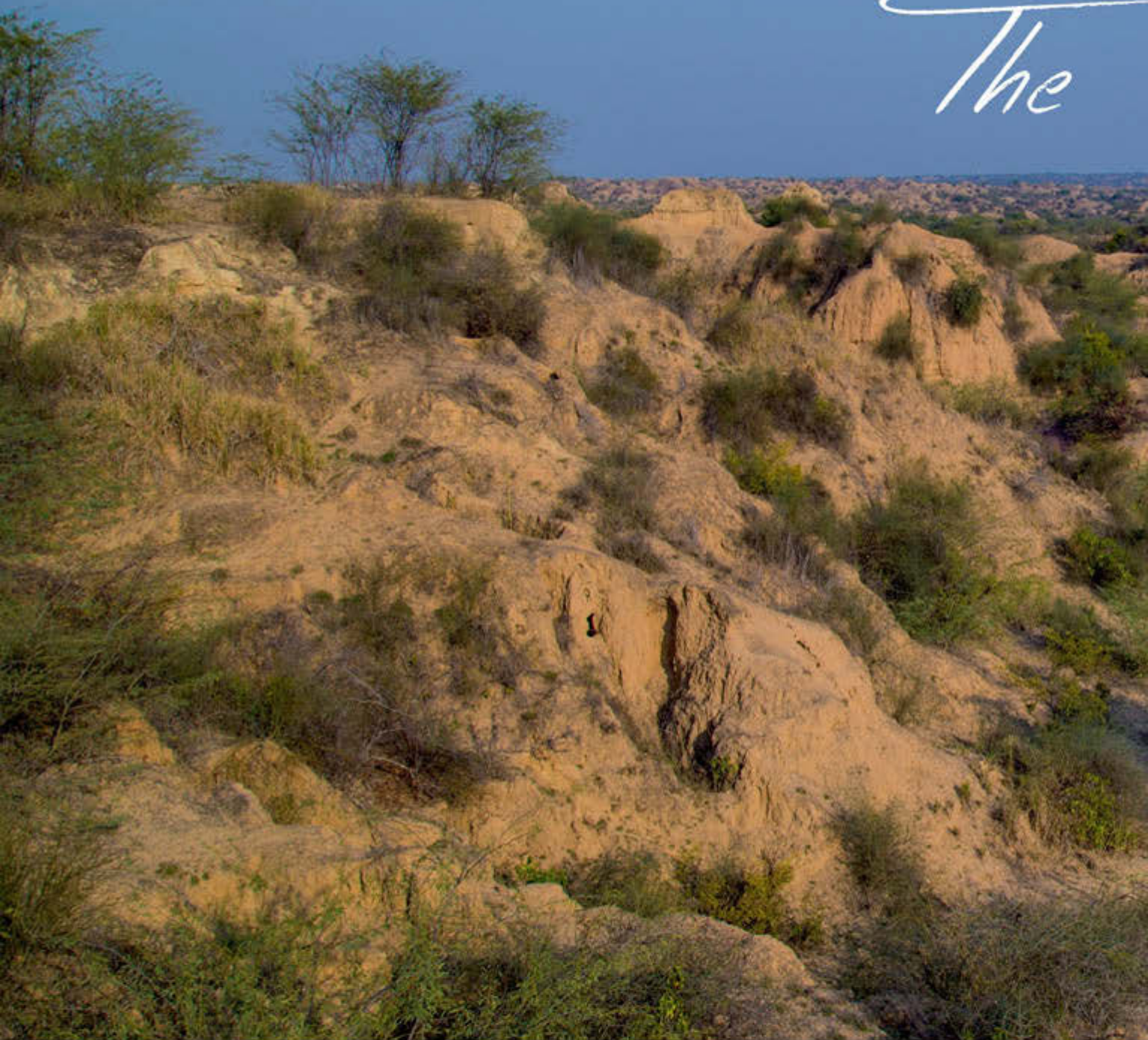
 **Good to know:** It gets very cold in the jungle especially early morning and late nights. So do carry a jacket on your safaris, irrespective of the season

 **Stay:** At Banjaar Tola, luxury tented accommodation by Taj Safaris

 **Getting there:** The closest rail link is Gondia. You can fly to Nagpur, Jabalpur or Raipur, depending upon the flights available to your city of connection. It is a 4-6 hour drive from each of these airports to the lodge.

Cost: ₹45,000 (Till April 2015) per person per night on sharing basis. This includes all meals, IMFL, safaris and taxes

 **When to go:** The park is closed from July to mid-October during monsoon. Two safaris daily: sunrise to 12 noon & around 3 pm to sunset depending upon the month
Contact: www.tajsafaris.com

The

The National Chambal Sanctuary covers a stretch of 400 km with ravines that criss cross the area. It was declared a protected area in 1979 to help revive the Ghariyal population. Chambal has plenty more to offer than the often heard dacoit tales. For one, the Chambal River, known for its pristine waters, is amongst the few places in the country where one can spot the rare Gangetic Dolphins. The gentle waters are best explored on boats and the River Chambal Safari provides spectacular opportunities for wildlife enthusiasts

WWW.INDIA TODAY IMAGES.COM



Ravines & Beyond

A drive through the Chambal region is filled with surprising wonders. Ancient ruins within a quaint temple town Bateshwar that once boasted over 100 temples dedicated to Lord Shiva—a rich birding paradise and picturesque ghats. Text and photographs by SIDDHARTH KAPIL





BATESHWAR VILLAGE

About 30 km away from the sanctuary is the scenic village of Bateshwar on the banks of the river Yamuna, a hidden wonder with ghats and ancient ruins. A perfect alternative from the chaotic ghats of Varanasi, this makes for a great weekend getaway.

The quaint town of Bateshwar, an ancient temple town, lies hidden 70 km from Agra. The place is named after the presiding deity of the region—Bateshwar Mahadev (another name for Lord Shiva).

It had more than 100 temples dedicated to Lord Shiva, all lined along the crescent shaped curve of the river-front, with pristine ghats adding to the serenity of the place. While only 42 temples remain intact, a handful of the temple ceilings still retain their beautiful original frescos paintings with vegetable dyes.

Bateshwar is also the birthplace of the 22nd Jain Tirthankar, Nemichand—and is an important pilgrimage site for both Digambar and Shwetambar sects of Jain devotees.





The National Chambal Sanctuary is home to two species of crocodilians—the mugger and gharial, 8 species of freshwater turtles, otters, gangetic dolphins and black-necked storks.



COURTESY: UP TOURISM





The river Yamuna is also home to a number of resident and migratory birds such as terns, cormorants, kingfishers and pelicans amongst others.



WANT TO GO?

National Chambal Sanctuary, situated in Chambal Valley, is a tri-state protected area for the critically endangered alligators, the red-crowned roof turtle and the endangered Ganges river dolphin. The Chambal Safari helps visitors discover the many facets of this ancient land. Accompanied by experienced local guides and naturalists, guests can explore the Valley at their own pace—on boats, jeeps, bicycles or foot. Visitors can also enjoy bird watching here. The best season to explore Chambal is undoubtedly autumn and winter when both altitudinal migrants from the higher Himalayas and Palaearctic region assemble here.

GETTING THERE: The nearest airport and railhead is at Agra 70 km away.

The ruins of Raja and Rani Mahal are a prominent landmark in the area. Though little is left of the palace, birding enthusiasts can have a field day spotting numerous species here





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ITC Grand Bharat Gurgaon

BY ARUSHI CHATURVEDI

As I was driven through the rickety roads of Mewat, Gurgaon in a brand new Audi, the majestic ITC Bharat Manesar became visible from miles away. A royal welcome awaited and it was like I had been transported into a different world all together. As I make my way deeper into the property, the hotel reveals its treasures. It is like being in fantasyland! Sprawling over 1.2 sq km it takes its inspiration from 'Bharatvarsh', encompassing the essence of India; the property stands like a majestic palace enveloped within the beautiful setting of the Aravali hills.



THE PROPERTY

It is difficult to believe that we are just 45 km away from the bustling Capital. Surrounded by hills and spectacular natural beauty this is almost a dream getaway from Delhi. I walk around the huge property and discover dramatic gazebos, beautiful water fountains and the massive main resort designed in the form of a 'mandala', or a circle, representing completeness. It is symbolic of a cosmic diagram, reflecting the relation of life with the infinite. This apparently is India's first all-suite resort.

THE SUITES AND VILLAS

The resort has some 100 suites and four Presidential Villas—which are the most expansive palatial residences with each of them inspired by a dynasty from India's glorious past—Maurya, Mughal, Maratha and Chola. I stayed in a Deluxe Suite with semi-private pool; the room was a beautiful mix of brown and pastels that open onto a charming patio and a luxurious semi-private lap pool. One can also opt for a Deluxe Suite with a terrace where you can enjoy your morning cup of coffee with a picturesque view.

DINING FACILITIES

The resort has three dining options that include Apas Promenade—a poolside marquee lounge that serves the Mewati Food, Aravali Pavilion for Innovative Indian Cuisine and The Indian Room for

creative European classics. My lunch at the Aravali Pavilion included *Palette of Pepperonata*, long grain Basmati and curry leaf pesto flanked by jalepeno kulcha and the very unique *Millet Risotto* with Morels and Okra Tempura. The flavour and plating was flawless and reflecting fine cooking. The resort also has a very classy Peacock Bar—an ideal place to unwind and indulge in the mixologist's signature molecular cocktails and resort's extensive wine and malt collection.

OTHER FACILITIES

For some real pampering the inhouse Kaya Kalp—The Royal Spa, is a must try, I tried the signature pomegranate scrub and to my surprise, I was told it made my skin glow and was quite relaxing too. The treatment rooms are aesthetically done and make for a perfect place to escape, away from the city's chaos. The resort is in the process of adding more rooms and yoga sessions in the morning for a more holistic experience for its guests.

For the more adventurous and sporty type there are the Segway rides and for golf lovers it has South Asia's first 27-hole Jack Nicklaus-designed golf course with an accompanying Member's Clubhouse. Budding golfing enthusiasts can make use of the resort's Golf Academy, while virtuosos can appreciate the charm of the sprawling greens and enjoy a day away from the usual.

AT A GLANCE

Address: P.O Hasanpur, Tauru, Mewat, Gurgaon, Haryana-122 105
Tel: 01267 285 500
Verdict: The resort is a perfect luxurious weekend getaway from Delhi and is easy to reach.
Price: Starts at ₹25,000 per night



GUEST PRIVILEGES

What few people know about the Grand Bharat, Gurgaon is that the hotel has a unique guest recognition system—that enables the staff to identify guest in public areas through specific devices. It is a one-of-a-kind special proprietary technology created by ITC to help track the hotels guests in times of emergency.





Acron Waterfront Resort

Baga, Goa

BY KANIKA SHARMA

After an hour's drive from the airport to Baga, I was greeted with some fresh cold towels, rose water and the resort manager Daren at the Acron Waterfront Resort. At the sight of sun beds half immersed in the pool and the view of the river and the ocean I knew this weekend was about leaving the winter behind and soaking in some sun. The setting rays pierced through the palms to shed light on the brightly painted rooms, as I walked along the cobbled stone path towards the far end of the resort, along the river that opens into the sea. Even though I was at the most happening beach of Goa, yet the seclusion had something better in store for me.



THE ROOM

This boutique property is sprawled over the Baga Peninsula and has 29 rooms. The river view room, which was my home for the next few days, opens into a small porch with a beautiful view of the river. If you wake up early enough, you can see the fishermen get into their boats and head out to get the day's catch. For early risers, this is a must-watch. With a section of the wall that is beautifully hand-painted, it is stocked with amenities such as a mini bar, electronic safe, a flat-screen and more. The comfortable couch and



three different kinds of pillows to choose from makes sure that you have a good sleep after a long day.

THE FOOD

The highlight of our stay here, apart from the ambience and the view, was definitely the food. The River Restaurant by Chef Cyrus Todiwala offers a fine fusion of Goan cuisine and some maybe even with a Parsi touch, in keeping with the Chef's lineage! The concept of the restaurant is very simple—no menu, so you get a personalised dish that every time caters to your taste buds only. Be it the raw *banana parantha* or the minced lamb with potato crispies, or just *chana chaat*—it is bound to tingle your taste buds.

Chef Cyrus' team and Executive Chef, Mark make sure you do not go back disappointed. From a *Kaju feni dessert* with strawberry jelly—to a simple chicken in tomato gravy with rice, you are sure to come back with a few extra pounds. Explore what suits your palate as Chef Cyrus says, "Trust your chef to feed you well, like you trust your doctor to treat you well." That makes sense!

OTHER FACILITIES

So here's to justify staying away from stepping into the sand. To begin the trip on a fresh note or

AT A GLANCE

Address: Acron Waterfront Resort, on the seaward side of the Baga bridge, Baga, Goa-403516.
www.acronwaterfrontresort.com
Tel: (0)77220 16888
Price: ₹11,941 onwards
Getting there: You have daily flights from New Delhi to Goa. The resort is 42 km from Dabolim airport. You can either book a cab or request the resort for a pick up.

end it on a relaxing note, you can go in for the Signature Spa Sitara massage, which is a mix of the hot potli and oil massage; you can follow this up with a leisurely steam bath and cool off in the temperature controlled jacuzzi. If you want to spend your days sailing through the ocean, the friendly resort authorities are more than happy to help you book a yacht for a good explore of your aquatic environs. It is an experience to remember. Who knows? If you are lucky, you might get a glimpse of the hard-to-spot dolphins too. To cool off the afternoon heat you can just relax by the bar at the infinity pool, where the feni mojito is an absolute must-try. To sum up—you have yourself a luxurious stay with a local touch.





Fredy's Bungalow Bhimtal

BY RITU AGARWAL

It is on a desperately needed long weekend break that we head off to Bhimtal. Fredy's Bungalow sounded exactly what the doctor had ordered. The drive is a 6.5 hours (approx 300 km) via NH 24 and NH 87 from Delhi and proves not so bad once we cross Ghaziabad. The bad does come much later, but, as we drive the final 2 km narrow, hill bank road winding up from Bhimtal Lake to the cottage, all is forgiven. The air is mint fresh and rain swept as we enter a quaint wrought iron gate to reach the home of Fredrick Smetacek Sr., a German from the Sudetenland, who had arrived in Calcutta in 1939 and moved to the hills.



Surrounded by deodar, cyprus and oak trees, perched on the hillside the colonial bungalow, now managed by Itmenaan Lodges, is beautifully preserved. We walk into heritage wooden interiors, charmed to see whole tree trunks laid across the length of the structure as support beams. The lobby has large glass windows that let the green outside merge seamlessly with the inside. A very British fire place, and a dramatic sunken den add tremendous character. We are already loving it. And then the butterflies register. Housed on the walls of the living



room is an incredible butterfly collection! Apparently Fredy Sr. had a passion and his part of his collection is on display in another butterfly museum as well.

SPACES

On offer are four bedrooms with attached bathrooms. Three upstairs and one off the living room at ground level. We go up the wooden staircase leading from the living area to the mezzanine level and after checking it all out settle for it. A common, spacious, covered balcony runs the back length of the top floor, with all there bedrooms opening out into it. It's an uncomplicated structure. An equally uncomplicated offering: lovely views of the woods, peace and quiet, some good food and absolutely nothing to do.

FOOD

The food at Fredy's comes as surprise. Besides Anand, who has been with the owners for many years now and plays manager, two local boys are available on call. Dhani has been trained to be more than a cook, and so he can plate up some pretty looking Continental fare as well. There is no formal menu, but we get consulted on what we'd like to eat and the boys run to the bazaar next to the Bhimtal Lake, and whip

AT A GLANCE

What: A stylish, small, heritage cottage run as a lodge

Where: Bhimtal, Uttarakhand

Contact: +91-9818705508 Email: info@itmenaanlodges.com

Cost: Starting at Single Occupancy: ₹5,176 per room per night. The tariff includes breakfast, morning and evening tea/coffee, and currently applicable taxes. But check website for latest applicable rates

up nice meals. From aloo-puri breakfasts to pasta, roast pumpkin soup, pan grilled chicken and *rajma-chawal* we get fed what our stomachs desire. The desserts include fresh bake puddings and pies.

MOOD

You can fill your days with boating, bird-watching or picnicking around Sattal and Bhimtal lakes. I chose to read, sleep, eat and take long walks. But I can see myself going back with a close gang, take over the property and see those wooden walls reverberate with laughter, chatter, card games and late nights on the balcony sipping Bloody Marys... This is a space that you can make what you want...a hiding hole or a party place. Either way, it's lovely.





Four Seasons at the Bosphorus Istanbul

BY HARSIMRAN SHERGILL

Not many hotels in the world can claim to be located at the confluence of the East and West. Four Seasons at the Bosphorus, in Istanbul is an exception. Sitting pretty in the European Quarters of the city, this former Ottoman Palace not only overlooks Asia but also makes for a chic city retreat. As we're ushered in, a warmly lit lobby makes quite a first impression. Sprinkled with intricately carved antiques and local art, I can already picture the area as a part of the palace, where men with long moustaches walked these corridors. But this Four Seasons is more than the history it encompasses; it's a modern day hotel that has become the place to be seen at.



ROOMS AND SUITES

Let me begin with the best. If Four Seasons Istanbul is your destination, and you're in the mood to spoil yourself rotten, then look no further than the Atik Pasha Suite. Its opulent interiors are a perfect blend of contemporary and Ottoman Turkish design. The suite typically has high ceilings and large windows, letting in lots of natural light—and the icing on the cake is the magnificent view of the Bosphorus. The suite has a large and welcoming entrance hall, with a separate study, kitchenette, a formal dining room and a master

bedroom with two walk-in closets. We're in the Courtyard Room that overlooks the hotel's grand entrance. The room has a certain air of sophistication, with a colour scheme of deep blue or terra cotta with copper and burgundy accents. Other amenities include a flat-screen, in-room movies, Wi-Fi and a fully-stocked private bar.

DINING SPACES

Lunch is served at Aqua, one of the dining spaces in the hotel. The restaurant is chic and has seating indoor as well as outdoors. The USP is the picturesque terrace that overlooks the waterfront, where you could indulge in a romantic dinner or just sip traditional coffee with Turkish delight at leisure. The restaurant serves up fine Mediterranean cuisine, with Italian specialties and signature dishes like fish and lamb. We're given strict instructions that breakfast is an absolute must-do. The next day at breakfast, I understand why. It is a feast for kings; freshly baked bread, some 20 different cheeses, traditional Turkish breakfast—the list is endless. I settle for the traditional gozleme, which comes steaming hot and is delicious.

HAMMAM AND SPA

It's impossible to sum up the Four Seasons experience and not

AT A GLANCE

Address: Ciragan Cad. No. 28 Istanbul, Besiktas, Turkey-34349;
Tel: +90 (212) 381 40 00 (reservations)
Price: Starts at €390 per night
Verdict: A luxurious hotel guaranteed to spoil you rotten

mention their Hammam and Spa. Having been to plenty of spas around the world, it was time to experience a traditional Turkish bath. Set in a sprawling 22,605 sq ft basement area, at the Hammam you can opt between a 30-minute invigorating kese (scrub), the 45-minute kese and foam massage, or get pampered with the 60-minute bath.

OVERALL

Typical of a Four Seasons property, this one ensures that all your whims and fancies are taken seriously. The staff is polite and happy to attend to even your smallest queries. Over the years, the group has mastered the art of hospitality so well that the Four Seasons Istanbul doesn't disappoint.



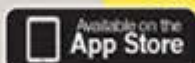
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Where Fashion Gets Personal

Angkor Golf Resort, Siem Reap

This Nick Faldo designed course, winner of many awards, is turning Cambodia into a premier sporting destination for golfing enthusiasts says RISHI NARAIN

Situated in the serene temple town of Siem Reap, Cambodia, The Angkor Golf Resort—a Nick Faldo design, is Cambodia's premier golf destination. Rated as Cambodia's best golf course by AsianGolf Awards 2014 and also Second Runner-up as the Best Maintained Course in Asia Pacific, this Par 72, 7279 yard championship course has seashore paspallum grass throughout the course,

giving golfers a genuine treat to hit off the fairways.

It was a fantastic experience for me playing this extremely well manicured course. Every aspect of the course stands out and speaks world-class. I was glad to see that golf carts had to stay on the cart path ensuring the fairways and areas around the aprons of the greens were well preserved. Each hole offers unique and ambitious

opportunities as the fairways are wide and generous.

However, with the omnipresent water hazards and bold bunkering styles on most holes, trademark Faldo features, you have to plan your shots wisely. The greens are immaculately maintained. They have subtle undulations which a first timer could easily miss. Make sure to listen carefully to the caddie's advice. The Par 4-18th hole is a signature Faldo hole,

making for a tough finish with the threat of water on both the drive and approach shot to the green. This leaves you with great memories of your round at Angkor. This 18-hole championship course has a 300-yard grass driving range and practice putting green, a chipping green and a warm and contemporary designed club house with men's and women's locker rooms. The Pro Shop is well stocked with all the leading



SWING TIP

When your swing feels off and shots are erratic, one simple check you should do is throttle down on your swing speed. Usually, golfers who play regularly begin forcing their tee shots in effort to get extra distance. This extra force and swing speed, throws off timing, rhythm and balance and leads to erratic tee shots without creating power. Always feel you are swinging at around 75% of your maximum power and you will actually get more distance, accuracy and satisfying hits off the centre of the clubface.



TECH TALK

R15 features a lower and more forward centre of gravity, to promote higher launch and lower spin. The Front Track system performs like a Speed Pocket, reducing spin and increasing the size of the sweet spot, and the 4° loft sleeve along with new sliding split weights make dialing in your tee shots easier. Price: ₹2,3000

TOP 5 Golf Courses



brands on display and the restaurant offers a variety of Asian and Western cuisine to satiate one's palate after an enjoyable round. The course offers golf carts, club and shoe rentals and well groomed lady caddies who are extremely knowledgeable about the course and greens. The club offers airport transfers and will also accommodate travel packages including sightseeing tours of the famous Angkor Wat Temple and surrounding areas. When in Siem Reap, this is the golf course to play.

Quick Facts

Green Fees: ₹7,500 (Weekdays & Weekend)
Tel: +855 63 767 688;
www.angkor-golf.com
Getting there: Fly from Delhi or Mumbai to Kuala Lumpur, Bangkok or Hanoi and connect to Siem Reap for approx ₹30,000. The Angkor Golf Resort is located 15 minutes away from Siem Reap Airport.

**HOT
DEAL**

Golf Travel Deal
3 Days/2 nights at The Sothea Siem Reap, a 5-Star property.
1 Rounds of Golf at Angkor Golf Resort
1 day sightseeing tour of Angkor Wat
Airport transfer
Cost: ₹37,500 (approx) for two golfers or ₹27,000 (approx) for 1 golfer and 1 non-golfer

- 1 CAMBODIA GOLF & COUNTRY CLUB:** The oldest golf course in Cambodia opened in 1996. Located 33 km west of the capital Phnom Penh the 7,077 yard par 72 course is set among 120 acres of land lined with sugar palm trees, evergreen plants, flowers and rocks.

Green Fees: ₹3,000 (Weekdays); ₹3,600 (Weekends);
Tel: +855 12 811 778; www.cambodiagolf.net

- 2 GARDEN CITY GOLF CLUB:** The best conditioned course in Phnom Penh, it opened in April 2013 and immediately emerged as one of the best golf courses in Phnom Penh. The par-72 golf course is laid out on 240 acres. The course conditioning from the use of Seashore Paspalum turf is very good and comparable with the top courses in the region.

Green Fees: ₹4,200 (Weekdays); ₹6,300 (Weekends);
Tel: +855 23 991 953; www.gardencityclub.com

- 3 SIEM REAP BOOYOUNG COUNTRY CLUB:** This Par-72, 7,396 yard course was designed by the renowned Japanese course architect Kentaro Sato. Generous palm lined fairways, and a choice of five tees on each hole enable players of all abilities to appreciate this course. Impressive saunas and an international restaurant specialising in Korean cuisine await you in the elaborate clubhouse upon completion of your round.

Green Fees: ₹3,000 (Weekdays); ₹4,200 (Weekends);
Tel: +855 23 366 689; www.golfcambodia.com



- 4 ROYAL CAMBODIA PHNOM PENH GOLF CLUB:** Located 8 Km from the Phnom Penh International Airport, the 7,075 yard Par-72 golf course is spread out over 200 hectares and nestled in amongst rice paddies and coconut palms. Being so close to the capital it is a favourite with locals and expatriates.

Green Fees: ₹3,000 (Weekdays); ₹4,200 (Weekends);
Tel: +855 23 366 689; www.golfcambodia.com

- 5 PHOKEETHRA COUNTRY CLUB:** The Sofitel managed course adds to the world class golf available in Cambodia. It hosted the 2009 Johnnie Walker Classic and the 2010 Cambodian Open. Located 15 minutes from the airport, this 7,145-yard par 72 course offers sweeping fairways and generous greens giving it a distinctive layout and feel.

Green Fees: ₹7,200 (Weekdays & Weekends); **Tel:** +855 63 96 46 00;
www.phokeethragolf.com/phokeethra/home.html



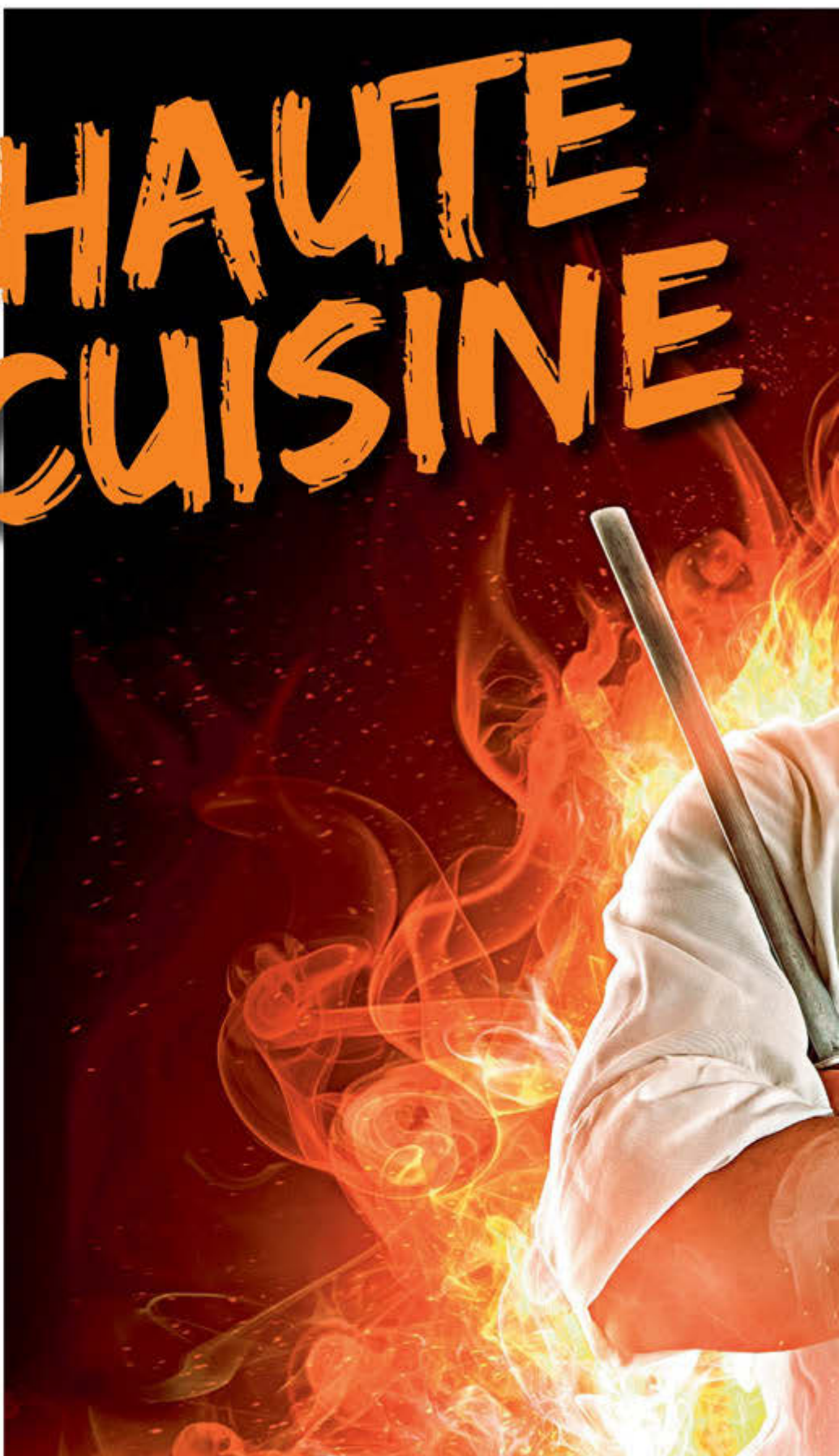
HAUTE CUISINE

Chefs no longer keep recipes and ingredients a closely guarded secret. At a congression of some of the world's top chefs every year in Spain they share, they demonstrate and they discuss. BAKSHISH DEAN returns from Madrid Fusión 2015 to share some things that will soon prove game changers in how the world eats

Renowned innovator and star Spanish **Chef Ángel León** is kicking things off with an intriguing talk called 'The Blood of the Sea'. As I listen on curiously I realise he is sharing his most recent culinary inventions using fish blood, inspired by the creatures that colonise the Atlantic waters adjoining his two-Michelin-star restaurant **Aponiente** (El Puerto de Santa María, Cádiz).

There was a time, not long ago, when such a scene would never have happened. Master chefs kept their ideas to

SHUTTERSTOCK





themselves. Secrets and recipes were kept tight to the chest. Taken to the grave with you. But here I am at the three-day Madrid Fusión-International Gastronomic Summit 2015 hosting over 100 chefs from 12 countries, 75 demonstrations, 18 training workshops, 7 competitions, auctions and awards... The idea of kitchens without doors is a phenomenon brought on by some high-powered chefs' congresses from around the world which have revolutionised the very definition of gourmet.

Madrid Fusion is the most extravagant amongst such global gastronomic events. The Spanish government, with EU backing, funds the event as it is an effective way of stimulating Spanish gastronomy and its golden generation of chefs led by Ferran Adrià (of the **El Bulli** fame).

This International Congress of Gastronomy is held annually for three days in Madrid, capital of Spain, since its inception in 2003,

and I am at the 2015 event (2nd to 4th February) which is their thirteenth consecutive year. Traditionally held in the end of January at the Palacio Municipal de Congresos, Campo de las Naciones Convention Centre; this World Gourmet Summit plays host to high profile chefs and indisputably an occasion for top chefs from around the world to give-and-take ideas and to receive their kudos!

Food exhibits, lectures, demonstrations and dinners organized and cooked by celebrity chefs from round the world who are invited to cook at Madrid's most renowned hotels and dining

Some of the hottest chefs from around the globe share their cooking concepts and codes; there were a few that I am sure will change the gourmet world

venues are some of the high points. But the biggest kick for a chef, as for me, was to revel in the fact that from right mixes to some of the weirdest combinations, everything seems to fit into the kitchen if the recipe is done right. This turns out to be a culinary adventure of a lifetime. As some of the hottest chefs from around the globe share their cooking concepts and codes; there were a few that I am sure will change the gourmet world this year:

SPANISH SUSHI

Chef Albert Raurich has been trained at the Michelin 3-star restaurant, El Bulli. For the past eight years he has established his ingenuity at **Dos Pallilos in Barcelona** which serves an enjoyable cuisine—a cross between Asian and Western. Japanese cuisine influences him in a lot of ways owing to his Japanese wife and talented Japanese chef Takeshi

Somekawa leaning on his right hand; his **Japanese-influenced Tapas** such as asparagus with kimzu and lyophilized soybeans will soon take over the world.

FOOD & DRINK PAIRING

Spanish chef **Andoni Luis Aduriz, of Mugaritz**, considered to be one of the best restaurants in the world, presented one of his classic dishes, as **bartender Toni Conigliaro** created a flawless corresponding cocktail. Toni's saffron, bell pepper and sherry for 'The Doubloon' with a great round flavour harmonised perfectly with the whiffs of the melted Beurre Noisette, Iberico ham and baked ray wing. The dish: cheesy, roasted with vegetable aromas. The drink: spicy, fruity and filled with green aromas.

SAUCES SERVED BELOW ZERO DEGREES

Chef Fernando Saenz owner of Della Sera is fondly called the ice cream maker of memories and specialises in culinary ice-creams that are high on flavour completely in harmony with the environment from which it comes and is radically natural. Classic examples are Raspberries marinated in Balsamic vinegar from Haro, Lemon Cream with olive oil from Alfaro, White wine lees fermented in oak, Sour grape and butter cream and Ibérico pork lard mantecada with saffron from La Rioja and cinnamon. **Eneko Atxa** specializes in Basque cuisine and believes in natural flavours natural ingredients, (his restaurant **Azurmendi** is ranked No. 27th in the World) and is an expert in concentrated



COURTESY: MADRIDFUSION.NET

TOP 5 FOOD CONGRESSES COMING UP IN 2015

- 1 **TUTTO FOOD FESTIVAL**
WHERE: Milan, Italy; **WHEN:** May 03 to 06
WHY: Ultimate place to compare experiences, evaluate market trends and comprehend the progress of consumption and buying patterns through the organization of targeted workshops, seminars, conferences, meetings and events. Italy's culinary traditions and its historical-artistic assets make it one of the most captivating places there is for astounding and unpredicted discoveries.
- 2 **EURO FOOD 2015**
WHERE: Alicante, Spain; **WHEN:** June 16 to 18
WHY: Addresses Food and Beverage Industries and related scientific communities to integrate sustainability into every facet of the sector and showcases best production techniques reassuring health and hygiene.
- 3 **FETE DE LA GASTRONOMIE**
WHERE: Paris, France (and a lot of events happen throughout the country on the same dates); **WHEN:** September 25 to 27
WHY: Amid convention and creation, France is an unblemished leader of gastronomy. Talented chefs compose simple and gourmet recipes to illustrate the flavours and authentic products of the various territories.
- 4 **ANUGA FOOD FESTIVAL**
WHERE: Cologne, Germany; **WHEN:** October 10 to 15
WHY: The trade fair concept is unique which brings in supply and demand together in 10 specialized trade shows under one roof; not only the largest food and beverage fair in the world but also the sector's most imperative fair for new markets being the perfect venue for all the cutting-edge trends and themes.
- 5 **ALBA INTERNATIONAL WHITE TRUFFLE FAIR**
WHERE: Alba, Italy; **WHEN:** October 4 to November 2015
WHY: A great mix of events showcasing all you ever want to know about the Truffle with celebrity chefs creating sensory experiences around this ingredient.

saucers that enhance flavours. Atxa collaborated with Chef Saenz and showcased some stunning saucers and sorbets absolutely natural and served below zero temperatures to go with mains courses.

FERMENTED VEGETABLES

People don't usually relish the tastes of things they find in their backyards but if you happen to see what **Chef Rodrigo de la Calle** shows you might start drooling over such plants turned food. Rodrigo de la Calle is the rare Spanish chef content to trade in his tortilla Española for more creative gastronomical

adventures. He loves his traditional food too but for the past ten years or so, De la Calle's blood has run green...here is a man who loves his vegetables more than any croquette or Jamoon Ibérico and he showed us how to transform black garlic, heaps of violet asparagus, and bushels of broccoli, vegetables, flowers, and herbs into prudently executed vivacious plates.

WATERLESS BROTH

Chef Ricard Camarena surprises his coastal town Valencia with fresh ideas, new concepts and successfully updated cuisine. He was termed

Outstanding Chef at Madrid Fusion 2006 and awarded his first Michelin star which led him to intensify his cuisine at **Arrop**, his restaurant. His session on preparing broths with reductions of the ingredients used, creating unique flavours and a natural intensity are difficult to match, surprised us all with its lightness and balance. Prepared by using just the right combination of ingredients: vegetables, herbs, spices which develop innumerable impressions and stimulation on the plate.

If you are a first timer you will think it is a fashion show meet academic

lecture at a UN summit, en route a scientific conference for quite a few chefs. It is hard not to be awestruck by the measure of the proceedings replete with headsets provided, UN-style, to give real-time translation in over six languages. It is spectacle yes, but, Madrid has been transformed into a clear world reference and recognized showcase for the up-to-the-minute techniques in haute cuisine. World's Top Chefs till take out time to make their way for this event, to learn.

I came away with the learning that the future of food is definitely in some great hands!



MUMBAI

EAT THAI

We don't quite know when it happened but a 'shabby-chic' memo went out to restaurants in Bandra asking them to immediately distress their walls and expose their ventilation ducts. Most of them promptly did that as did Eat Thai, the new 'modern-Thai' joint in Bandra. They have clearly decided to demolish Thai clichés with their modern look and insistence that burgers can also be Thai with the right spice mix.

Eat Thai is serious about being modern. They've got the iced coffees with tapioca pearl (₹175), snacking bowls—perfect for 4 pm pangs, platters of honey fried chicken wings in Sriacha Sauce (₹395) all served with a Thai twist. But that's not authentic, cry the purists. Who cares, says we? It's delicious, spicy and hits the 'Thai' spot.

The answer for authenticity can perhaps be found in their more 'traditional' fare. When Som Tam (₹225), the yardstick by which any Thai place worth it's basil demands to be judged, passed the 'crunchy-spicy-yummy' test, we began to feel like we'd

Must try
THAI TEA
PANNA COTTA



stumbled upon the joint that would solve all of Bandra's 'Thai food' emergencies—but then came the Green Thai Curry (₹475) and destroyed that hope with it's overdose of coconut milk. Even the King Prawns with chilly sauce and sweet basil (₹625) were more reminiscent of China than Thailand. The Thai Tea Panna cotta (₹250) bravely attempted to salvage the game but our the verdict was in; we say Eat Thai for 11 am munchies and the coffee breaks and maybe don't Eat Thai for the mains. Go straight to the panna cotta!

SHARAN SAIKUMAR

PALI HILL, BANDRA WEST 8/9, GASPER ENCLAVE, MUMBAI

CUISINE: Thai and Asian | **Contact:** (022) 2645 9775 | **Open:** 11:00 am-12:00 midnight
Meal for two: ₹1,300 approx. inclusive of taxes

BANGALORE

FISHERMAN'S WHARF

Tucked away on a calm road leading off from the chaotic Sarjapur Road, the restaurant is actually large and sprawling. A spacious reception with tables opened towards a massive central island-bar around which are three gazebos. In true Goan style, they are open, with sloping roofs covered in red tiles, and interspersed with lawns and greenery.

Goan food aficionados will find themselves in paradise here. Though the menu extends to generic Indian, Asian and Mediterranean staples, these are more of an exercise to keep all kinds of palates happy. But the star is Goan. Start with stuffed mushrooms (₹299), the crispy coating a lovely foil to the soft and flavoured mushrooms inside. The duo of shrimp and calamari peri peri (₹375) is fiery and will make the senses sing, and should be ideally countered with the delicate golden fried prawns (₹425). But the taste buds are bound to hit a high with the chicken cafreal (₹425)—tender chicken morsels offset by the dark green spicy masala. There's plenty on the plate for the mains but these are classics that should not be missed: soft and fluffy

Must try
SHRIMP AND
CALAMARI PERI
PERI



Goan pav with tongue-tingling chicken xacuti and rich pork vindaloo (₹425), followed by steamed rice with a Goan prawn curry (₹450) which is full of flavours. There's only one way to end a meal like this: bebinca (₹225), a layered pudding, prepared fresh, which is not overly sweet and melts on the tongue. Help it along if you want with a scoop of fragrant vanilla ice cream.

ANITA RAO KASHI

SURVEY NO.26, HARALUR ROAD, AMBALIPURA, OPPOSITE SHUBH ENCLAVE, HARLUR, BENGALURU-560102

Cuisine: Goan, Indian and Asian

Cost: ₹2,000 for two

(buffet lunch ₹660 per head, Mon to Sat)



Must try
PORK
BELLY

NEW DELHI

THE HUNGRY MONKEY

I haven't been to the Safdarjung Enclave's B-6 market in a while so it was a pleasant reintroduction to this space lacing the Deer Park. I walk up the mandatory flight of steps to enter The Hungry Monkey (THM).

"Curiosity is the beginning of adventure"... the quote is mounted big and bold on a rough, brick finished wall; the interiors on this floor are warm, wooden with golden hued lights. I settle into a nice corner table of the first floor which is crafted to be a "dining space" as against the fun, "bar-like" mood of the second floor. There is a terrace as well on the third level, which would be lovely in the right weather when Delhi needs all the al fresco spaces it can drum up.

The menu is California-inspired with French detailing tells us the young and bright Chef Noah Barnes, who heads the kitchen at THM.

Given that I am constantly on a hunt for the perfect French Onion Soup, I jump at it (₹375) and we get some of

the Bang Bang Szechuan Chicken (₹395) for starters. The soup is just right with a nice meaty stock flavour. And the chicken with a peanut dressing seems a twist on the satay.

The menu is elaborate with a neat selection of Burgers, Pastas, Risottos and Sliders along with the mains of grilled meats, steaks, steamed fish, prawns, pork, ribs...et al!

I had to try the pork belly (₹950) infused with star anise that melts in the mouth and is bursting with flavours. The steamed mustard and chilli halibut (₹650) comes wrapped and cooked in a banana leaf on a bed of saffron couscous. The lemon and thyme cake (₹295) that we polish off as we round up the meal, is to die for.

Honestly, I found the food at THM good, solid, and less gimmicky than some of other new age eateries that have come up. And for me, that scores them an extra point. I think most people when they go out to dine want food to feel like food.

The drama of serving becomes immaterial if the food takes second place. And here Chef Barnes is doing it right.

RITU AGARWAL

B6/6, DDA MARKET, SAFDARJUNG ENCLAVE

Cuisine: Contemporary Global | **Contact:** (011) 4604 9801, +91 9810788196 | **Timings:** 12:00-3:00 pm, 7:00-11:00 pm | **Bar:** Yes | **Cost:** Mean for two, ₹2,000++ (without alcohol)



RUMA SINGH

Is a former full time journalist, who is now pursuing her passion—study of wine, while also writing on food and travel. Based in Bangalore, she blogs on wine on *Between The Wines* at www.rumasingh.com, and writes for various leading publications.



Emilia Jackson
MasterChef Australia
Semi-Finalist



Reims—the heart of Champagne

Reims is considered by many to be the Champagne region's capital. It is beautiful, with many of the big Champagne brands located here, along with heritage buildings, superb dining and plenty of natural beauty to explore.

Getting there: There are high speed trains (TGV) from Paris Gare de l'Est to either Champagne-Ardenne TGV station (8 kilometres outside Reims) or to Reims Centre station (in Reims itself). Or hire a car in Paris and drive down (90 minutes).

Don't miss: Visit the large, famous champagne houses—Ruinart (ruinart.com), Pommery (vrankenpommery.fr), GH Mumm (ghmumm.com), Lanson (lanson.com), Taittinger (taittinger.com) and Veuve Clicquot (veuve-clicquot.com). Not sure? Book half-day or full-day tours with local tour operators La Vigne du Roy (www.lavigneduroy.com) for customized visits.

Stay: Les Crayeres (www.lescraieres.com) is a stunning 20-suite château with rooms from €450-500 and 3 notable restaurants.

Mercure Reims (from €100), and several popular B&Bs like Le Bouligrin (€70).

Dine: Brasserie du Bouligrin (bouligrin.fr), Au Conti (grandhotelcontinental.com) and plenty of cosy champagne and wine bars, bistros and elegant restaurants.

Historical Reims: Reims has a rich history going back to Roman times and has been invaded and fought over. It was almost totally destroyed during the World War I but rebuilding it in the 1920s-30s created many beautiful Art Nouveau buildings. The city also offers three UNESCO World Heritage Sites for those with cultural interests.

Explore: Champagne boasts of some magnificent countryside including the Parc Naturel de la Montagne de Reims where you can walk or mountain bike for miles.

Some fun stuff: Flâneries Musicales de Reims is a series of concerts held in June-July with a line-up of famous performers. You can also take cooking lessons from Eric Geoffroy (Au Piano des Chefs aupianodeschefs.com/en/)

“Indian Food Needs Full-Bodied Wine”

After a busy day, or on a special date, which bottle of wine do you love to pop open?

My favourite type of wine is Riesling. Colin from the show (MasterChef Australia) makes a beautiful one, and he introduced me to them. It's beautifully balanced and goes with so much.

And the food you would pair it with?

We have some great modern Asian restaurants in Melbourne at the moment, I love drinking Rieslings with raw fish and light flavours.

The most memorable food and wine experience for you from all your travels?

My friend and I decided to splurge in Nice, France. So we went to the coast and ordered the most extravagant seafood platter; it came with three levels of freshest seafood and was amazing. But way over our budget as backpacking tourists.

A MasterChef moment you remember, that featured wine and food?

I used a lot of red wines while making sauces, especially during the semi-final. I made beef cheeks with a red wine and vegemite reduction.

Would you consider pairing Indian food with wine? Which wine do you think would suit it best?

Indian food is full of flavour and spice so it needs a full-bodied wine that can stand up to that.

A learning that you took away from MasterChef—in one line.

Way too much to fit into one line, just want to say—I learnt more than I could ever imagine.



Wine Events
AROUND THE WORLD
APRIL 2015

1. **INTERNATIONAL WINE TOURISM EXHIBITION, CONFERENCE & WORKSHOP 2015 LA CHAMPAGNE**, From 8 -9 April 2015 in Reims, France
2. **COONAWARRA AFTER DARK**, From 10-11 April 2015, around Coonawarra, Australia
3. **BAROSSA VINTAGE FESTIVAL 2015**, From April 15-19 in Barossa Valley, Australia
4. **SALÓN DE GOURMETS**, From 13-16 April 2015 in Madrid Spain
5. **WINE AND GOURMET JAPAN**, From April 15-17 April 2015 in Tokyo Japan
6. **SALON DES VINS DE MÂCON**, From 17-19 April 2015 in Mâcon, Burgundy, France
7. **EXPOVINIS BRASIL 2015**, From 22-24 April 2015 in Sao Paulo Brazil
8. **WINE & DELICACIES-18TH INTERNATIONAL GASTRONOMIC FAIR IN PRAGUE**, From 22-24 April 2015 in Prague, Czech Republic



Gundruk ko jhol

NEWA RESTAURANT

It is a wrong notion that only the non-vegetarian food in this region tastes good. Though there's no doubt it is known for its non-vegetarian delicacies, this particular vegetarian dish is made up of dry saag, mostly radish saag, and if not that, then *rai* saag—that has chopped garlic and onion sautéed with *haldi* and chopped tomatoes. It is of a soupy consistency, which makes it most apt for any weather.

Hentay

GOMPU'S

These are small dumplings (much smaller than regular momos). Chopped *dung dung* (that is a locally available leafy vegetables) or onion ka sag, mixed with local cottage cheese, called *churpi*, with salt and chopped green chilly—is stuffed inside the *maida* dough. With a dollop of local fresh butter on top, it is a must-try dish. One is it not enough and a bite of this makes you crave for more.

Fungbi

TANGGULAM

Staying in a homestay in Kalimpong has a different charm altogether. When you are served good food, it makes it even better. One of my favourite dishes here is *Fungbi* which is a product of soya that is made from the by-product of rice noodles. The pieces are chopped into small cubes and then fried with crushed garlic in oil along with salt and red chillies.



Sukuti ko achar

SHIKAR

Though a traditional dish, this might not suit everyone's palate. But since the Capital doesn't offer much of Kalimpong's local cuisine, I miss eating it a lot. Usually fish is soaked in lukewarm water, dried, cut into small pieces and then deep fried in a wok. It is then mixed with a ground *dallay*, salt and strained dry pieces. This is a must-try on-the-side dish if you are here.

Pork Trotter

ROOTS, SHOOTS AND BED

This particular place is a homestay that serves traditional food and is located just about 10 minutes away from the Kalimpong auto stand. Their pork trotters are delicious. The chopped upper portion of pig trotters is mixed with a good amount of sliced onion sliced ginger, sliced tomatoes, red dry chilly, *haldi*, salt, mustard oil and one big lemon (squeezed) and mixed nicely and then cooked under pressure for 5 to 8 minutes. It is lip-smacking.

AS TOLD TO KANIKA SHARMA

1

2

3

4

5



KUNAL GHATANI

Kosher Kalimpong

with Sonam Sherpa

The lead guitarist of Indian rock band *Parikrama* now resides in the Capital, but one thing he misses from home is the food. When there he usually prefers dining at home given that his "sisters and sister-in-law are great cooks". But for our readers he shares a few places in Kalimpong where you can try some of the local dishes. "Do order rice on the side. It's a killer combo," he adds.





INDIA PICTURE

As you drive to Mussoorie, the step farms on the hill slopes add to its beauty



Club Mahindra Kanatal

Take a quick glance at this year's calendar and it would be evident that many public holidays fall on a Friday or Monday. One such Friday in March was being celebrated with the festival of colours. While many chose to get drenched in myriad shades of gulal, we chose the vivid shades of green, blue and white that the vistas of the Garhwal Himalayas present themselves in.

With scant traffic early in the morning, progress is quick despite the narrower, pothole-strewn highways of Ghaziabad to Modinagar. A quick stop for a fill of *paranthas* and *chai* after 100 km and I gave the Renault Duster AWD the beans as smooth four-lane tarmac greet us. Four hours from Delhi, we closed-in on Dehradun. Clean mountain air, the smell of freshness and a nip in the air promises good times ahead.

It is that time of the year when you'd be lucky to see snow or catch the last snowfall of the season. With a friend hailing from Bangalore who hadn't experienced the white beyond the realms of his freezer, we decided to take our chances. Passing the bustling state capital in the Doon Valley, we started the hill climb towards the Queen of the Hills—Mussoorie. Our hopes were high as it was still snowing here till April last year. But as luck would have it, we found nothing but bone-chilling gusts of wind. Locals

IN SEARCH OF SNOW

A long weekend beckons a road trip to the foothills of the Himalayas says ABHIK DAS



told us that we might be able to find snow in Dhanaulti. Around 26 km from Mussoorie, winding roads lead to Dhanaulti as we get our first glimpse of the snow-capped Bandarpunch Range.

So near yet so far—the feeling was one of disappointment to not experience the last snow of the season at Dhanaulti. Yet, the tranquillity of the hills was enough reason to lift our spirits as we ended our journey at the beautiful Club Mahindra Kanatal Resort to kick back for the next couple of days.

AT A GLANCE

Dhanaulti is a very small town falling midway between Mussoorie and Chamba. About 58 km from Dehradun and 26 km from Mussoorie, Dhanaulti is easily accessible via taxi if you don't have your own conveyance.

STOP ALONG THE WAY
MUSOORIE IS A RECOMMENDED STOP FOR LUNCH, TRY EATERIES LOCATED ON THE FAMOUS MALL ROAD. FROM THERE ONE CAN ALSO HEAD TOWARDS KEMPTY FALLS WHICH MAKES FOR A NICE PICNIC SPOT AMID THE MOUNTAIN RANGES AND THE GREENS

The drive takes a little over two hours and the only major traffic spot is while exiting Dehradun. Be sure to visit the 'Amber' and 'Dhara' ECO-Parks for a nominal fee to experience the flora and fauna of this beautiful region.

STAY

While the entire region is sprinkled with resorts and hotels, we chose the Club Mahindra Kanatal Resort which is around 18 km away from Dhanaulti. The lavish resort is nestled among thick foliage and overlooks beautiful snow capped peaks. There are a host of adventure activities for both adults and kids to experience besides a variety of cultural entertainment performances for the evening.

Contact: www.clubmahindra.com/our-resorts/club-mahindra-kanatal



SANJAY TAMTA

(Top) Past the bustling town are small villages that are still homes of local weavers; (Below) Cutting through the mountains and driving on plains, the Renault Duster AWD was the right choice for a smooth ride



PAWAN DAGIA

DEHRADUN
247 km

MUSOORIE
278 km

DHANULTI
303 km



VERNA GETS MORE PIZZAZZ

Hyundai is claiming that the Verna is a world sedan and the new variant ensures that Hyundai is trying to offer the same quality worldwide. BY RAHUL GHOSH

There is little to doubt that Verna was the car which gave a boost to the brand image of Hyundai. It was proven that affordable could be premium too. However, there have been some inherent problems (read wallowy ride and an overtly light steering setup) the Verna has had right from day one and we had been complaining about the same as well. The company took care of some of the bits during the last facelift, but now most of the problems have been taken care of.

We begin with the front end which comes with a new pair of projector headlamps, a new grille and also a new front bumper complete with chrome highlighted fog lamps. In profile, 16 in diamond cut alloys have been added and at the back, the tail lamps are longer and the bumper is new too. The rear bumpers also house reflectors much like the other Hyundais on the road. Hyundai has also opted for a concealed exhaust and that aids the clean look.

However on the downside, we are surprised that Hyundai omitted day time lights on this new version. Inside, changes include a new six-speaker audio system complete with 1GB internal storage. The armrest now comes with a sliding top and the driver's seat comes with a new rotary knob to adjust the height. Hyundai has also added an external lever on the front passenger seat which enables the rear passenger to adjust the front seat in order to open up more kneeroom. The rear seat too is more comfortable now and better than the front buckets. Surprisingly once again, Hyundai has not offered a rear AC vent on this new Verna either. But the biggest change is that the steering is now adjustable for both reach and rake.

Start her up and it feels surprisingly quiet in spite of being the 1.6-litre diesel variant. The gearbox feels smooth and the clutch is light too. But the most exciting bit of the Verna remains to be how it performs. The 128bhp motor is a tower of power and as a result the acceleration is rapid. Even with the tachometer around the 3,500rpm mark, the motor is barely audible inside. At cruising speeds too, the Verna is a comfortable car to be in.

The steering has been completely reworked and as a result the system feels well weighed and responsive. No longer does the steering feel that it is floating in the sky and not connected to the wheels.

Adding to the fun and adventure factor is the suspension. The suspension setup is now stiffer, which makes the car handle better. Now the Verna drives and handles like a treat! The smaller ruts and bumps are barely felt within the cabin. This is also the case when the car is travelling at a high speed. Around corners the Verna feels planted even at speeds over 120 kmph. The wallowing, a driver's worst and the biggest nightmare, has gone. Even if there is a big undulation on the road, it does not bottom out any more!

Lastly, Hyundai is offering upto six airbags with the new Verna, but it will be available on the top-of-the-line variant only.

Price: ₹11 lakh (estimated)

TIME TO SCRAMBLE

It's strange how history repeats itself and sometimes with ridiculous accuracy. Today we are in a situation similar to 1962, the year when the first Scrambler was launched. Back then, Ducatis were known for being serious motorcycles built for outright performance. The Scrambler, by contrast was an easy going bike that reined in new riders who





ENGINE	1,582CC, 4-CYL INLINE
POWER	182BHP@4,000RPM
MAX TORQUE	260NM@1,900RPM
GEARBOX	6-SPEED MANUAL
WHEELBASE (MM)	2,570 MM
GROUND CLEARANCE	165 MM
AIRBAGS	SIX (OPTIONAL)

The new projector headlamps add to the character of the new Verna. Not to forget that it offers better illumination. The 1GB of internal memory on the audio system comes as a boon.

The new Hyundai Verna makes touring much fun, thanks to its reworked suspension. The seats have been reworked as well and now offer better thigh support, which helps during a long drive. Not to forget the rather large boot which can take in plenty of kit.

were looking for something a little less ferocious and intimidating. The bike enjoyed a run of 12 years before production ended in 1974 when Ducati moved to its iconic L-twin engine configuration.

Switch to 2015 and it feels like '62 all over again with Ducati's lineup, everything from the Monster to the 1299 Panigale, all about 0-100 figures, lean angles and track times. Yet again there's a gap where people are looking for a fun and friendly motorcycle—and the Scrambler comes to the rescue.

The new Ducati Scrambler seems to pick up right from where the old one left off. In true retro styling it features a tear drop yellow tank with aluminium inserts, a dual sport style seating and high and wide handlebars. The most appealing attribute of the Scrambler is its bare simplicity. Yes, it is a machine made in 2015 but there are no aerodynamic body panels, no traction control, no self targeting machine guns and no electronic

throttle control. It gets ABS though.

The Scrambler feels like it was built to have fun rather than be worried about track times and lean angles. Right from when you swing your leg over the seat, it feels light. Thanks to the lack of body panels and a relatively short wheelbase it feels compact as well. The seating position is upright and supremely comfortable thanks to those high

ENGINE	803CC, L-TWIN
MAX POWER	75BHP@8,250RPM
MAX TORQUE	68NM@5,750RPM
GEARBOX	6-SPEED
WHEELBASE (MM)	1,445 MM
FUEL TANK	13.5 LITRES
KERB WEIGHT	170 KG



handlebars which are sort of, just built for comfort. The pegs are slightly rear-set but don't feel odd and there is ample space for a pillion. The single clock features a digital display with a speedo and a tachometer. There is no fuel gauge though. Start the bike up and you are treated with new DRLs, courtesy Audi, along with a slightly mistimed thump.

Shift into first gear and the bike rolls off the line effortlessly and the

moment you start off you realise how light the bike actually is. It feels very flickable and agile. Rig the throttle and all of the 75 horses are thrown to the road and it scrambles for the horizon in no time with the front wheel coming off the ground. The off-set thump turns in to a roar as you cross the 6,000rpm mark and you realise that while it is friendly and docile it can be a complete hooligan as well.

The gearbox slots with slick precision and you can run through all six gears in 10 seconds or less. The suspension too is setup to perfection and provides the perfect balance between a sporty and comfortable ride. It absorbs the bumps with aplomb and when you approach a corner it leans in quite easily when you power out. The Pirelli MT 60 dual purpose tyres grip well and provide decent grip on loose surfaces as well. When you're done, sit back relax and ride.

Price: ₹7.5-8 lakh

By Kshitij Sharma

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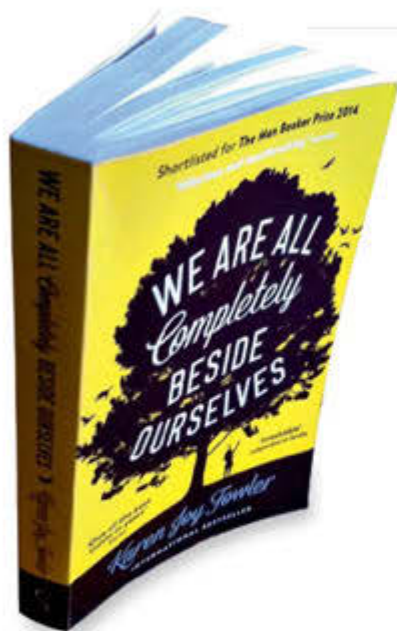
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Moving back and forth

Set in the Midwest, USA, this delightful story of a quirky family is beautifully written and easy to read. **By Kalyani Prasher**

When she was five years old, Rose came back from a three-week trip to her grandmother's to find herself in a new house, her mother depressed, and—at the centre of this all—her sister missing. Her life changed forever after that trip.

The tale of the Cooke family is almost ordinary when compared to some but for Rose, losing an adored sibling, dealing with a mother who is suddenly “vaporous”, and not being in her favourite house with the apple tree and a creek is pretty darned traumatic.

Something happened that year, her fifth, when Fern went missing, which no one talks about, an unspoken rule for the Cookes. But, at age 43, she has come to a point where she needs to go back to the year 1979 and re-chart what exactly happened; relive her life and all her emotions with the help of that unreliable ally: memory. It's a funny family story, it's the story of Rosemary Cooke and her lonely childhood, it's the story of sibling love and parental resentment but, above all, *We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves* is just a brilliant read. As you read on, you make friends with Rose and she starts to tell you about the stuff no one talks about—this is when a great twist is revealed in this seemingly ordinary story, and you're hooked. A brilliantly written evocative narrative, this book should be on every reader's list.

Hachette India; ₹499

NEW
ON THE
SHELF

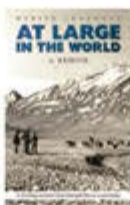


THE UDUPI KITCHEN

Little do people know that Udupi cuisine has a vast variety and is not limited to tiffins or snacks.

Laying out the geographical expanse to the region's Madhwa Brahmin's vegetarian food habits, Malati Srinivasan and Geetha Rao showcase the unknown recipes from Udupi.

Westland; ₹495



AT LARGE IN THE WORLD A MEMOIR

The adventurous life of a newsman, this book is an account of Harish Chandola, the author's journey from his childhood in the hills to his experiences as a journalist with renowned newspapers. His memoir provides insights into landmark events in history.

HarperCollins; ₹499



MEMORIES OF BELONGING IMAGES FROM THE COLONY AND BEYOND

It can be read as a collection of slightly offbeat musings on certain aspects of over a century and a half of this country's history. The visual is integral to each piece as Malavika Karlekar through a rough historical sense divides it into three parts.

Niyogi Books; ₹487



ASHWIN SANGHI

He is ranked among India's highest selling English fiction authors and has written bestsellers like *The Krishna Key*, a crime thriller with James Patterson & a non-fiction title '13 Steps to Bloody Good Luck'.

TOP 3 TRAVEL READS

Most of my reading happens when I'm on the go. There is no better companion than a great book on a long-haul flight. Here are three recent thrillers that kept me hooked.

DARK PLACES

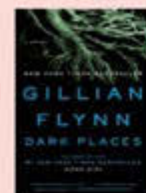
BY GILLIAN FLYNN: I knew of Flynn through her bestselling novel “Gone Girl”. This one is far better than that. Libby's mother and sisters are slaughtered and her testimony results in the conviction of her brother, Ben. Twenty-four years later, Libby meets the Kill Club, true crime enthusiasts who believe that Ben is innocent. The end is an incredible twist.

THE GIRL ON THE TRAIN

BY PAULA HAWKINS: This one is simply unputdownable. Rachel takes the very same train into London each day, wondering about those who occupy the homes she observes. But then she sees something disquieting and it results in a horrifying series of events culminating in a revelation that I couldn't see coming.

THE SILENT WIFE

BY A. S. A. HARRISON: This is Harrison's first and last novel (she died of cancer shortly before publication) but what a story it is! Jodi and Todd have been happily living together for 20 years. And then something happens. One becomes an alleged killer and the other a woeful victim in a riveting tale.



Great value-for-money offers!

SHERVANI HILLTOP | Nainital

WHAT | A shout out to nature enthusiasts who want to explore the blooming buds and green hills of Nainital.

DURATION | 2 nights/3 days

PRICE | ₹16,500 onwards

PACKAGE INCLUDES | Accommodation, breakfast and dinner, complimentary transport to mall, nature/jungle walk and recreational activities at the resort.

VALIDITY | Till May 10, 2015

CONTACT | email: reservations@shervanihotels.com
Tel: (0) 94111 97601; www.shervanihotels.com



THE MARRIOTT | Jaipur

WHAT | Mysha Services brings you a special package to experience the legendary history of the Pink City.

DURATION | Two nights

PRICE | ₹15,120 onwards

PACKAGE INCLUDES | Accommodation in a deluxe room, breakfast, AC cab for 8 hours, within city limits, for shopping or local sightseeing.

VALIDITY | Till September 30, 2015

CONTACT | email: info@myshaservices.com
Tel: +91 11 4106 0747/57; www.marriott.com/hotels



AAMOD | Dalhousie

WHAT | With the snow almost gone, retreat to the hills and experience its magnificence and serene pleasures

DURATION | Per night

PRICE | ₹7,000

PACKAGE INCLUDES | Accommodation, complimentary accommodation for 2 kids below 6 years in same room

VALIDITY | Till June 30, 2015

CONTACT | email: reservations@aamod.in
Tel: +91-9213022540/41/42; www.aamod.in

MARASA SAROVAR PREMIERE | Tirupati

WHAT | Take a spiritual summer break in Tirupati at this hotel located en route to the Lord Venkateswara temple.

DURATION | 2 nights/3 days

PRICE | ₹7,938 onwards

PACKAGE INCLUDES | Accommodation, breakfast, one way airport/railway station transfer, all applicable taxes

VALIDITY | Till June 31, 2015

CONTACT | email: msp@sarovarhotels.com
Tel: +91 877 228 2001; www.sarovarhotels.com

**HOT
DEAL**

Opt for a 2 nights' stay at **Ananda-in the Himalayas, Garhwal, Uttarakhand** that includes meals and spa experience from ₹30,400 onwards. Valid till September 2015. www.anandaspa.com

**HOT
DEAL**

A quick trip gets better with a good deal. With visa on arrival facility, fly down to Hong Kong in five hours and stay at **Harbour Grand, Kowloon** that offers third night free for two consecutive nights stay at **₹23,500**. Valid till May 2015. kowloon. harbourgrand.com

SHANGRI LA HOTEL | Bangkok, Thailand (4 hrs 30 min)

WHAT | With visa on arrival, Bangkok makes for a good long weekend getaway with the BonusChoice package.

DURATION | Minimum 2 nights

PRICE | ₹11,200 onwards

PACKAGE INCLUDES | Accommodation, airport transfer, dining credit of THB 1,800, spa treatments credit of THB 1,800

VALIDITY | Till August 2015

CONTACT | email: slbk@shangri-la.com
Tel: 000 800 600 1107; www.shangri-la.com/bangkok/shangri-la

KEMPINSKI HOTEL ISHTAR DEAD SEA | Amman, Jordan (5 hrs 26 min)

WHAT | Travel to this visa-free country and go on a journey of luxurious stay with the 'Eat, Stay, Love' package.

DURATION | One night

PRICE | ₹14,600 onwards

PACKAGE INCLUDES | Accommodation, all meals included, complimentary Wi-Fi, complimentary Minibar and complimentary tea and coffee facilities.

VALIDITY | Till May 2015

CONTACT | email: sales.ishtar@kempinski.com; Tel: +962 5 356 8888; www.kempinski.com



PARK HYATT | Maldives Hadahaa (4 hrs 34 min)

WHAT | With visa on arrival, experience the essence of Maldives through pre-arranged activities.

DURATION | One night

PRICE | ₹55,700 onwards

PACKAGE INCLUDES | Accommodation, breakfast, 15% off of the Hyatt daily rate, ₹9,400 credit per night

VALIDITY | Dec 2015

CONTACT | email: maldives.parkhadahaa@hyatt.com
Tel: +960 682 1234 maldives.hadahaa.park.hyatt.com



THE ROYAL PALM | Mauritius (7 hrs and 30 min)

WHAT | Unwind from the not-very-long journey. With visa on arrival, make the most of this last minute deal offer.

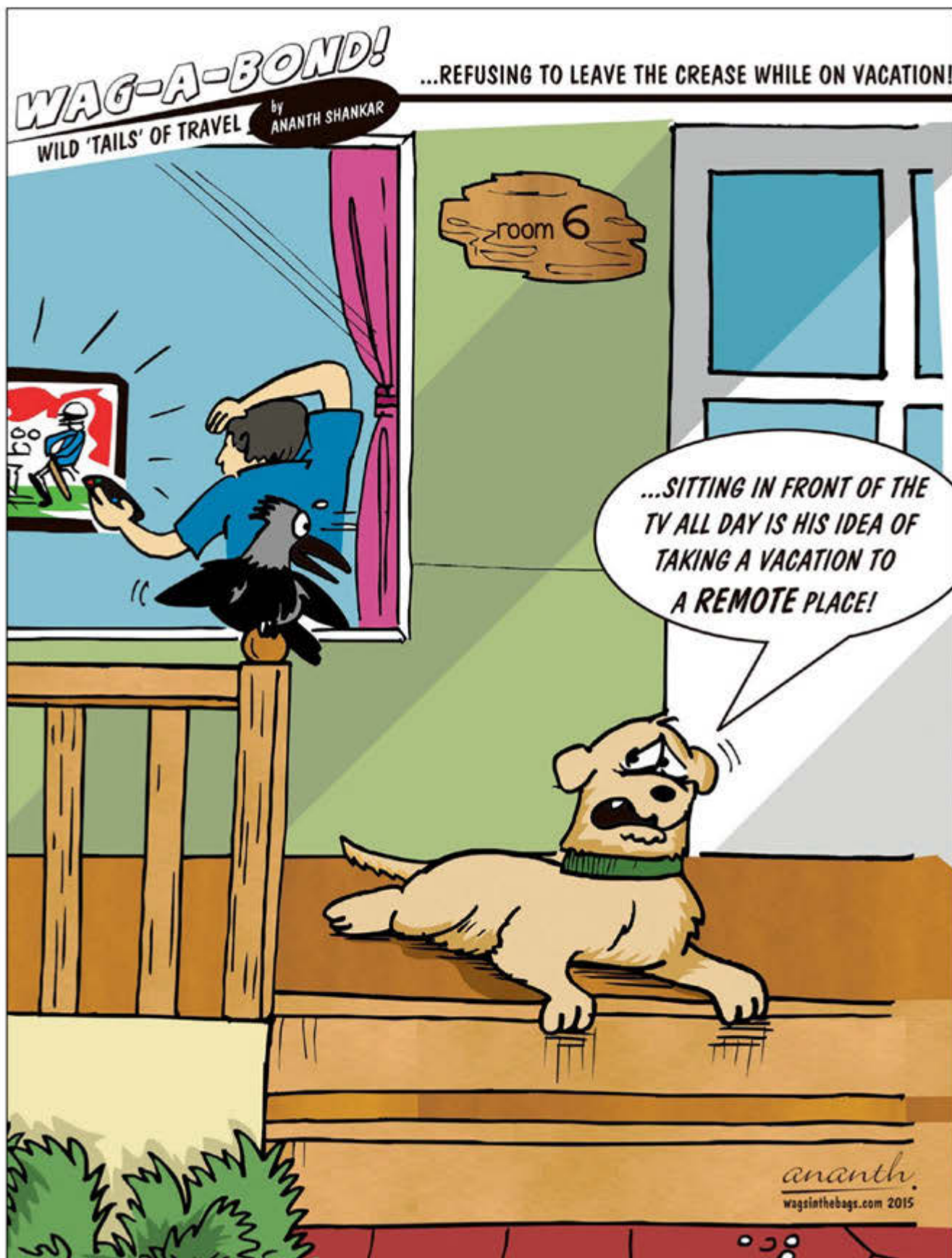
DURATION | Per night

PRICE | ₹47,000 onwards

PACKAGE INCLUDES | Accommodation and up to 15% discount on booking. Combine it with various other offers

VALIDITY | October 31, 2015

CONTACT | email: For queries you can submit an online form; Tel: +230 209-8300; www.beachcomber-hotels.coms



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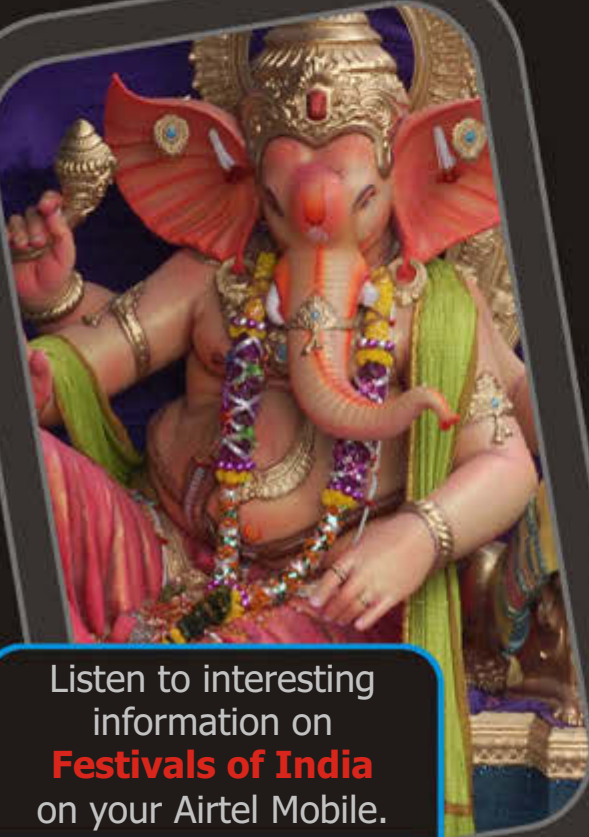


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